

UiO : **Department of Literature, Area Studies  
and European Languages**  
University of Oslo

# Old English Unstressed Vowels: Dialects and Diachrony

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Master's Thesis Spring 2014





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May 2014

Thesis submitted to the Department of Literature, Area Studies and  
European Languages, University of Oslo, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

This thesis is worth 60 ECTS credits.



# The Old English Unstressed Vowels: Dialects and Diachrony

**Abstract. Master's thesis, submitted spring 2014**

The primary aim of this thesis has been to investigate the development of unstressed vowels from early Old English and into the late Old English period, and to tie the observed changes to the later merger of unstressed vowels in English to [ə].

Texts from the four principal dialect areas of Old English are examined and compared, drawing where possible on previous scholarship. Although it must be noted that the process of reduction in unstressed syllables is an inherited linguistic trait observable in cognate languages, two intralinguistic explanations for the phonological changes seen in Old English are offered in addition to a discussion on the effects of language contact.

The thesis finds that unstressed vowels in some pretonic suffixes behave differently from vowels in grammatical endings, and that while front vowels underwent an earlier merger in the northern dialects, the back vowels appear to have merged earlier in the southern areas.



## Acknowledgements

In writing this thesis, I was reminded on every page of the enormous benefit I have had of discussing language with friends and colleagues at the universities of Oslo and Vienna. I am reminded of an anonymous byword: “if you are the smartest person in the room, you are in the wrong room”.

I find myself rarely in the wrong room, and have benefited in particular from the input of Sverre S. Johnsen and Michael Frotscher as well as Kjetil E. Albertsen, whose comments on my drafts left the text in a much improved state. My supervisor Michael Benskin finds the weaknesses of every flawed argument; any inadequacies which remain are mine alone.

I am grateful to my parents who taught me how to play with language, and whose double holiday regimes introduced me to the world and the usefulness of polyglossia.

Finally, I am thankful to the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages at the University of Oslo for generously financing my attendance at the FGLS conference at Newnham College, Cambridge this January; to the Erasmus Programme for facilitating my studies at the University of Vienna for one year; and to the Norwegian Institute of Palaeography and Historical Philology ( $\phi$ ) for granting me an MA scholarship, enabling me to focus on the present work.

## Abbreviations used

<i>CP</i>	=	The OE <i>Cura Pastoralis</i>
e (as in “eWS”)	=	early
Gk.	=	Ancient Greek
Gmc.	=	Germanic
Kt.	=	Kentish
l (as in “lWS”)	=	late
ME	=	Middle English
MHG	=	Middle High German
ModE	=	Modern English
ModG	=	Modern German
MS	=	manuscript
OF	=	Old Frisian
OE	=	Old English
<i>OEG</i>	=	<i>Old English Grammar</i> , Campbell (1969).
<i>OET</i>	=	<i>Oldest English Texts</i> , Sweet (1885).
OHG	=	Old High German
OI	=	Old Icelandic
OS	=	Old Saxon
PIE	=	Proto-Indo-European
St ppl.	=	Strong perfect (past) participle
St pret pl.	=	Strong preterite plural
<i>VP</i>	=	The Vespasian Psalter gloss
WGmc.	=	West Germanic
WS	=	West Saxon

Such abbreviations as are conventional, such as sg. for “singular” and “acc.” for accusative, will also be used. Charters will be referred to by the numbers assigned to them in *OET*.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

From the OE. period down to the present day there has always been a tendency to weaken the vowels in unaccented syllables, and then often for the weakened vowels to disappear, cp. *EOE. Gr.* ch.iv and *EME. Gr.*<sup>1</sup> ch. iv. In dealing with the changes which the accented vowels underwent in the earlier period of the language it is generally possible to fix approximately the date of the changes, but it is practically impossible to do the same with the vowel-changes in unaccented syllables . . . (Wright, 1924, §141)

This thesis aims to investigate the development of the unstressed vowels in the various dialects of early English until the early tenth century, when West Saxon slowly began to influence the other dialects, resulting in a Koine-like English *Schriftsprache*.

The sequential loss of variation in unstressed vowel phonemes will be evaluated individually for each dialect, and linguistic contact will be taken into consideration.

Finally, for any given change in the vocalism of a grammatical prefix or ending, it must be considered whether the substitution is, in fact, phonological (and if so, whether phonological merger was enabled by loss of phonemic status), or whether it may instead be the result of analogy, gram-

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<sup>1</sup>Wright (1923) and Wright (1928), respectively.

matical processes, or other factors not to be explained through historical phonology.

The later loss of phonemic contrast was grammatically driven in some areas (Kitson, 1997), and the information conveyed only by inflectional syllables was frequently redundant, even in early OE (Benskin, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Method

Initially, it must be said that both the number, geographical distribution, and scope of extant texts from this very early period is severely limited. Where we have very early texts, almost nothing is found a few hundred years later; vice versa for the areas which are well covered in the later period. The usefulness of any given text is also quite often very limited: runes are notoriously difficult to interpret with any confidence; the same can be said for some MSS.

The quantity and quality of the unstressed vowels will be evaluated on the basis of comparative data. The monuments and texts examined are selected on criteria defined in the following sections. Dialectal variation will be of particular interest.

However, it is a matter of some difficulty to assess the unstressed vowels of Old English: northern forms differ from southern and earlier forms from later, but one must be careful to mind the possible causes of these differences.

Localisation is also a problem. For example, though a runic monument can be considered a direct record of the language of that time, and is unlikely to have moved too far from where it was originally made, it still constitutes nothing more than a *likely* testament to the language of that area: not only could the rune master have moved from elsewhere in the country — or even from the continent — he could also have been trained by someone

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<sup>2</sup>Though Benskin's analysis is from *Cynewulf and Cyneheard* (Earle and Plummer, 1965, 46 ff., Parker MS 755 AD), an early WS text, there is little reason to believe the results had been much different in prose of other OE dialects.

of a different dialect and thus connected sounds and symbols in a different fashion from what we might expect.

Because of this, this thesis will rest largely upon an investigation of sound correspondence between the various Old English dialects and the continental Germanic languages.

The pre-history of English is not covered here: good accounts are found in the *OEG*, in Wright (1925), Ringe (2006), Brunner (1956); Fortson (2010), Streitberg (1974), and Hirt (1932). The situation resulting from the linguistic pre-history of English was that “OE had the unaccented vowels *a*, *æ*, *e*, *i*, and *u*” (*OEG*, §368).

The variation during the early Old English period will be examined, focusing where possible on grammatical endings, as these provide the most stable and comparable context for unstressed vowels: sound-change in suffixes behaves differently from sound-change in inflectional endings because of the half-stress of derivational syllables.

The tendencies of vowels in the individual grammatical categories will be considered in a dialectal and diachronic context, explaining some of the observable developments. As a mode of explanation, intra-linguistic factors will be preferred where they are plausible: see section 7.

However, some recent claims regarding the substrate influence of Celtic and British Latin spoken by Celts will be considered: “language shifts are almost invariably preceded by widespread bilingualism” (Weinreich, 1953, 94), and the imperfect learning of phonology is one hallmark of adult-onset bilingualism (Baetens Beardsmore, 1982, 60). Thus, one may expect some colouring (“interference”) from the first language of the conquered (Weinreich, 1953, 14-28).

Possible causes of phoneme merger may range from language contact and imperfect L2 learning, general linguistic drift (syncretism) from a higher level of inflection to a reduced level of inflection (as is common in the Indo-European languages), loss of phonemic quality due to other phonological processes within the linguistic system of English, or influence from prestige languages.

It may be hazardous to limit oneself to one model for explaining a com-

plex linguistic shift which consists of many smaller phonological mergers. Did the back vowels [o] and [u] merge at an early date for a different reason from what caused the later merger of [i] and [y]? And how may this be tested?

The example of the confusion of *e* and *u/o* in the first-person singular verbal ending in early south-eastern texts is a convenient one: one finds that *u* and *o* are confused in other grammatical inflections as well; thus, they have probably undergone a phonological merger. However, *e* is never confused with back vowels in other grammatical categories; hence, the confusion is likely to have been grammatical and not phonological.

In this case, it seems clear enough that the generalisation of the old subjunctive inflection in the first-person singular — perhaps for politeness — is the cause of confusion.<sup>3</sup>

The intention is here to examine individually each shift, and suggest the model that in each case seems the simpler (i.e. better) explanation. For example, one may explain the spread of initial [v] and [z] in English through the influence of Anglo-Norman, which had both phonemes in initial position and held a prestige position within the linguistic landscape of late mediaeval England.

### 1.1.1 Definitions

#### Early and Late Old English; Middle English

The divide between early and late OE is not straightforward. In the words of Joseph Wright (1925),

[t]he division of a language into fixed periods must of necessity be more or less arbitrary. What are given as the characteristics of one period have generally had their beginnings in the previous period, and it is impossible to say with perfect accuracy when one period begins and another ends. For practical purposes Old

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<sup>3</sup>Another possibility is analogy from the second- and third-person inflectional vowels (Bryan, 1921); in either case a phonological explanation is ruled out.



English may be conveniently divided into two periods: early OE.  
from about 700 to 900; and late OE. from 900 to 1100.

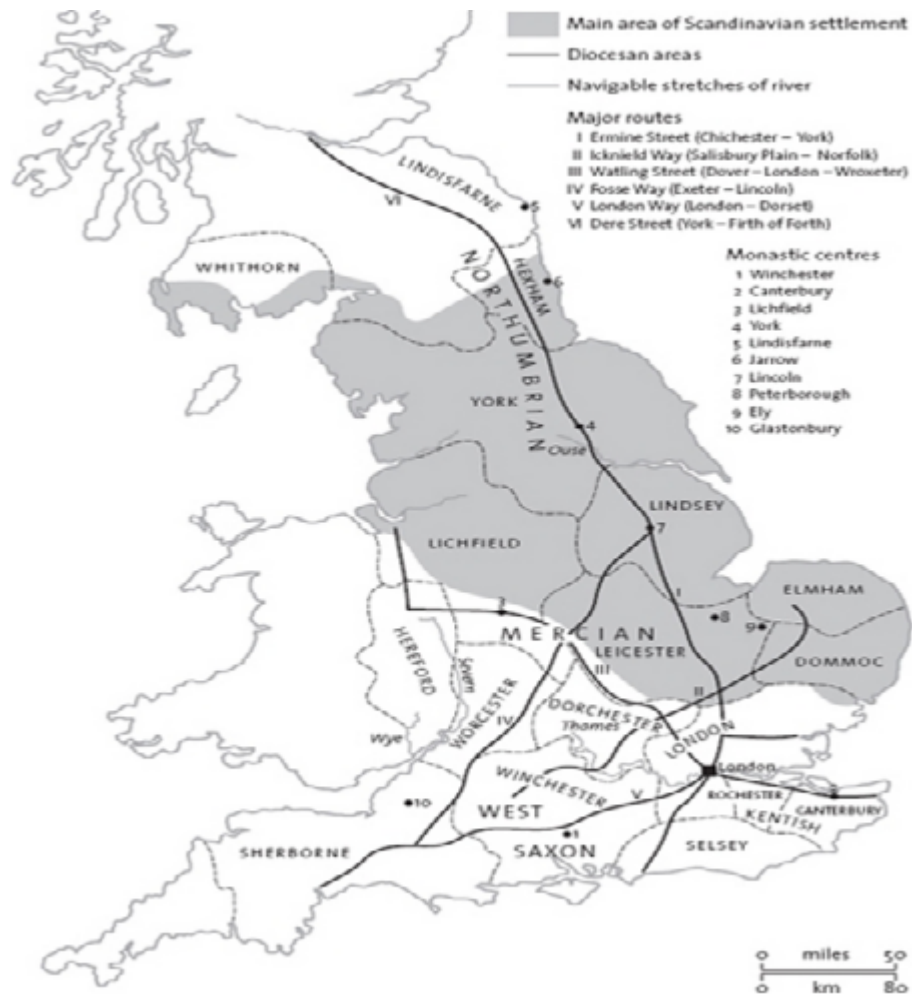
The above, while true, only covers part of the story: for not only is the divide between “early” and “late” fuzzy within one homogeneous spoken language; dialects, too, change at different rates. Thus, when one dialect was already “late”, another would remain “early” or vice versa. Hogg (1997) adds: “By naming a particular period of the language “Old English” or “Middle English”, we actually reify that period.” Another approach is to admit that the dating is arbitrary, and simply posit that it is the year that defines “early” and “late”, and that the archaic features of one dialect when compared with another is simply an archaic feature within that dialect. For the sake of this thesis, it is useful to delimit the material to early texts; defined as early is any OE text written before 900 and extant in a contemporary source.

As “Old English” is defined any Germanic dialect spoken in England from the landing of the first ships until the transition to Middle English. Placing this transition around the year 1100 “probably represents the consensus, insofar as there is one, of current scholars” (Kitson, 1997, 222), though in many areas it would have been later (*idem*, 250). Contrarily, Malone (1930, 110-117) puts the beginning of the ME period “at 1000 or thereabouts” on the grounds of inflectional morphology. Distinguishing by lexicon would also have been possible: (Lutz, 2002).

In practice, the age of the texts investigated range from the runic monuments of around AD 700 until late Old English; texts later than the transition to Middle English around 1100 will only be briefly mentioned to provide a rough overview of the later developments within the individual dialects.

### 1.1.2 Dialects and Geography

The OE dialects may be divided as illustrated in Crystal (2004, 51), and with the reservations given in *OEG* (§19). This map includes the major routes as well as the “Main area of Scandinavian settlement”:



In ME terms, these dialectal areas appear significantly different: “if one tries to map onto such OE dialects [i.e. dialects delimited by the four kingdoms traditionally acknowledged in OE dialectology] the far more sophisticated results of Middle English dialectology, this mismatch of methodologies is likely to be troublesome” (Hogg, 1997, 213).

It makes sense, then, to think of the dialect of any given text as the dialect of the scribe or, at most, the diocese or town in which the scribe was active. This means that dialect borders, particularly in OE, should be avoided; Brook (1963, 43; 62) provides them for the map of ME dialects but has not included them on the map of OE dialects.

This causes problems because the division of OE texts into four chapters, one for each dialect area, inevitably means that some texts cannot be placed with any certainty into either chapter; where this is the case (such as the Durham Admonition, which is certainly southern but may be either early West Saxon or early Kentish: this uncertainty is reflected in the commentary to the text in *OET*, 175-6), the authority of other scholars provides the foundation for the decisions made here.

On the ME dialects, see also Burrow and Turville-Petre (1992, section 1.2).

### 1.1.3 Selection of texts

Initially, a general examination of the earliest English texts will have to be made. The texts used are generally those listed by Toon (1992, 427), see the below table (which is the same as Toon's, but adapted for the different page format used in this text), with some additional texts mentioned in the *OEG*, as well as some minor runic inscriptions.

Date	North	Midlands	Southwest	Southeast
675	Rune Auzon			
700	PsScholia, RuthCr	Ch., EpGl		
725	Bede, Cæd, BDS	Ch.		
750	LRid	Bede, Ch.		Ch.
775		Ch., BlGl, ErfGl		Ch.
800		Corp		
825		VP, LorPr, LorGL		Ch.
850			Ch.	Ch., Med
875			Ch., Gn, Mart	
900			CP, ASC	
925			Or, ASC	
950		RoyGl	ASC, Med	Ch., KtHy, KtGl, KtPs
975	Ru2, LiGl, DurRit	Ru1		

The most striking fact presented by the above table is that the north is entirely unrepresented for 150 years — with its earliest safely dateable

inscription, St Cuthbert's coffin, of AD 687 — and that the southwest (i.e. primarily WS) barely presents any useful data until about 875. In the south-east, short texts are all there is, and because Canterbury had clergy from all over England, much of the writing may not represent the local dialect; the Mercian area appears to present the most useful data across this timespan.

As is evident from the discussion of Northumbrian, many runic spellings found simply cannot have been accurate representations of the spoken language.

Looking beyond these problems, however, there is still some useful material for the examination of unstressed vowels. It is worth noting that stress is not a binary system of either stressed or unstressed: the OE metrical system suggests that half-stress was also possible.<sup>4</sup> And though half-stress may have been non-phonemic (cf. Ladefoged (1975, 104-110) on ModE), some retentions in the vowels of half-stressed syllables will show that it was nevertheless a factor in the development of the English vowel system.

Of particular interest are pretonic prefixes and verbal endings, because they provide historically distinct unstressed vowels in similar phonetic contexts, and because they may be compared with those endings found in cognate Gmc. languages. On the other hand, the comparative practice is very difficult in the case of composite nouns: frequently, un-etymological connecting vowels are inserted, no cognate forms can be found, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

The end result of an examination of these texts will result in a sketch of the geographical distribution of the various unstressed vowels in different contexts, which will provide useful background information for an examination of the late Old English as well as early Middle English unstressed vowels until their final merger to [ə] (the dating of which is controversial and dialectally sensitive).

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<sup>4</sup>Metrically, tertiary stress may be invoked: Fulk (1992, ch. VII, particularly B).

<sup>5</sup>On the topic of the unusual words used to translate Latin in glossaries and other translated texts, Sweet (1896, Preface, viii) writes: "As the Old-English literature consists largely of translations, we may expect to find in it a certain number of words which are contrary to the genius of the language, some of them being positive monstrosities, the result of over-literal rendering of Latin words".

### 1.1.4 The dating of texts

Individual texts are listed chronologically in the chapters on the respective dialects. The year listed for the texts is generally that provided by the editor of the individual texts<sup>6</sup>. Unless otherwise specified, the dating supplied in *OET* and by Toon (1992) is used.

The extent to which this reflects the actual age of the texts with perfect accuracy is, of course, highly variable. It may be worth noting that even where we do, in fact, know the exact year a text was written, another unpredictable variable comes into consideration: the age of the scribe. A scribe may have been active for as much as 50 years, and during those years, his language may have changed: see Davis (1952).

Thus, any value given as the age of a text must be seen as a range of as much as 100 years of linguistic continuation. For the same reason, palaeographical dating must be taken with a grain of salt.

### 1.1.5 The written representation of speech

Any investigation of the phonology of a dead language rests heavily on the presumed correspondence between writing system and sound.

Old English scribes are very consistent in their representation of accented vowel sounds, but every accented syllable did not have the same vowel sound in every dialect, or even at every time within one dialect. ...The vowels of OE unaccented syllables are expressed with the same symbols which are used in accented syllables. Naturally the values of these symbols would here be only approximately the same as in accented syllables (*OEG*, §48).

Throughout the present work, the following must be kept in mind:

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<sup>6</sup>For the sake of saving space in the tables only, where a range is given (e.g. 870-890), the average will be used (i.e. in this case 880), and where the value is given as e.g. “late 10th century”, this will be listed as 975, i.e. the middle of the latter half of the century

1. The *futhorc* of the earliest texts is not a monolithic, internally consistent entity;<sup>7</sup> see Page (1973, Ch. 3).
2. Neither is the Latin script: one example is the interchange of *i* and *y* described by Sweet (1871, Introduction, xxvii).
3. The phonetic value of any given symbol did not necessarily remain constant throughout the early English period, nor even within the same text (the difference between ModE stressed and unstressed vowels being just one example to the contrary).

Hogg (1992, 84) writes:

Three of the principal parameters for phonological contrasts in Old English were similar to those today: backness, height, and lip-rounding. But in addition vowel length formed a significant contrast. Let us take these in turn. For backness there was a two-way contrast, i.e. [front] vs. [back]. For height there was probably a three-way contrast, so that vowels were either [high], [mid] or [low].

Though this may be true for the stressed vowels of late WS, the system outlined by Chomsky and Halle (1968) with binary categories of, e.g., [+FRONT] or [-BACK], does not work particularly well for a discussion of phonological merger as a diachronic process where what one is looking for is something more similar to [ $\pm$ CENTRAL-ISH]. The clear-cut correspondence between the symbols and the matching sounds, too, fails to apply to the unstressed vowels (Hogg (1992, 88) covers this, albeit briefly).

One could, in theory, remedy this by simply adding more categories: more levels of frontness, backness, highness and lowness as well as roundedness, but the appeal of the system lies largely in its simplicity, which would be entirely lost were one to increase its possible number of combinations to one facilitating its use in this context.

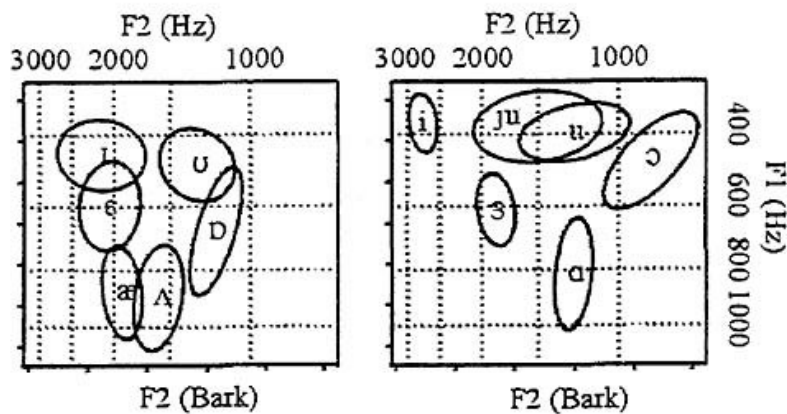
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<sup>7</sup>Keep in mind also the First Law of Runo-dynamics (attributed to David M. Wilson): “for every inscription there shall be as many interpretations as there are scholars working on it”.

Instead, a set of vowel/sound correspondences for the OE dialects, based largely upon the vowel quality of Latin and the correspondence with continental Gmc. vowels will have to be used. This will not be constant and consistent for all texts at all times, but generally, it is still the better option.

Another assumption which will be necessary to make here is that the choice of vowel symbols in stressed syllables in some way, or to some extent, corresponds to the choices made in unstressed syllables. Though an *a* would certainly have sounded different in a stressed initial position from an *a* in an unstressed final syllable, they would have resembled one another more than, say, an unstressed *i* and an unstressed *o*.

More specifically, the opposition postulated between stressed and unstressed variants of the same vowel is that of one non-reduced and one reduced (i.e. centralised) allophone corresponding to each vowel symbol. Though not meant to be an exact representation of *the* Old English vowel phonology (indeed, no such thing existed because the dialects are bound to have sounded dissimilar from one another), the following chart should be a helpful representation of this idea (with the reduced vowels on the left):<sup>8</sup>



Page (1973, 59 f.) writes: “The general Anglo-Saxonist usually wants the editor to do the rune-master’s work for him, and so make the inscription more accessible”, yet Page also implicitly reminds the reader of the dangers

<sup>8</sup>For obvious reasons, this chart is not based on Old English. Rather, it represents vowel reduction in “the Queen’s Christmas broadcasts of the 1980s” (Harrington et al., 2000).

of this approach in the discussion of the right panel of the *Franks Casket*: “The main inscription . . . has arbitrary or cryptic forms for most of its vowels . . . scholars differ over whether to give these their common values or to disregard them as too cryptic. It seems best to transliterate them in the usual way, ‘e’ and ‘a’” (*idem*, 181; on the Franks Casket symbols, see also Eichner (1991) and Bammesberger (1991))

Though the vowel runes do not by necessity correspond exactly to the Latin vowel symbols into which they are transcribed,<sup>9</sup> the differences were negligible,<sup>10</sup> but that the nature of these differences is impossible to establish convincingly.

One obvious case of peculiar runic vowels is the right panel (the Bergallo panel) of the *Franks Casket*; see the discussion in the chapter on Northumbrian and the above paragraphs.

Finally, it will be assumed that a vowel symbol represents roughly the same phonetic realisation in WS as in Northumbrian, and that a transcribed runic <u> (generally: ʀ) corresponds roughly to an *u* in Latin script, and accordingly for the other vowel symbols.

### The interface between text and speech

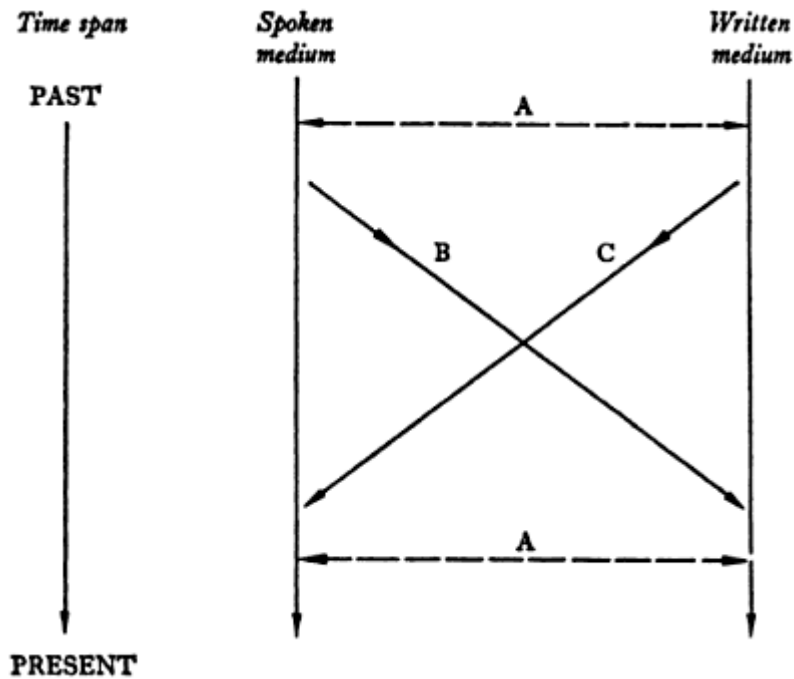
The interface between text and speech may be illustrated as follows (Samuels, 1972, §1.3):

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<sup>9</sup>See also (Page, 1973, 220): “we must always keep in mind, when dealing with runic texts, that we may face a rather different system of representing sounds from that we are used to. We can never equate runic and manuscript spellings unthinkingly.”

<sup>10</sup>This due to later developments in English, where the outcomes of those vowels written in runes does not differ from the outcomes of those written in Latin script, as well as the similarity between the vowel choice in, say, Cædmon’s *Hymn* and the *Franks Casket*. Of particular help is the fact that one Latin word on that casket — *afitadores* — is written in runes, which helps us establish the sound correspondence between the remaining vowel runes on the casket and the sound value of the Latin.





Samuels adds that “a majority of linguistic changes arise in the spoken language, and may or may not ultimately spread to the written medium... the main influence of the written language is a conservative one”. Because of this, written forms in the early language will be understood as representations of the spoken language.

### 1.1.6 Grammatical forms

In order to compare on an equal basis the unstressed vowels of different dialects, one needs to compare occurrences in the same grammatical forms, be they inflectional endings, unstressed prefixes, or derivational suffixes. Additional forms which regularly feature unstressed vowels are the oblique stems of certain noun classes (e.g. *byrig*, *dogor*), as well as svarabhakti vowels in, particularly, the root nouns (which are covered separately in section 6.1.2).

Only a few forms are found with any frequency and can thus be compared across the entire corpus:

**Unstressed prefixes** The pretonic prefix *ge-* (*gi-*) in particular is common in all dialects on both verbs and nouns; *be-* (*bi-*) slightly less so.

**Verbal endings** Frequently occurring are 1sg present ind., the st pret pl., the infinitive, and the strong past participle.

**Nominal endings** The following are found with any consistency: the gen.sg. of the *a*-stems and the non-nominative of the *n*-stems; the dat.sg., and the dat.pl.

**Svarabhakti** Often found in the root nouns, but also elsewhere, e.g. *gearuwe* next to *gearwe*.

In addition, several rarely occurring forms add interesting comparative information, and are included where possible.

In chapters two through five I will cover the Kentish, Mercian, Northumbrian and West Saxon dialects, respectively; chapter six will provide an overview of the data I have collected, and chapter seven will discuss some potential causes for phonological change.

Finally, chapter eight will contain a conclusion.

## Chapter 2

### Kentish

In this chapter, the unstressed vowels found in the earliest texts from Kent and Surrey will be examined. Kentish is a difficult dialect to assess in the very early days of OE simply because, as with the southern dialects of England in general, there are extremely few texts of significant quantity or reliable provenance. It should be kept in mind throughout this chapter, and similarly through the discussions of the other OE dialects, that “the differentiation of Kentish from other dialects is due to the isolation of the area rather than to the descent of the inhabitants from the Jutes. In fact, the most obvious Kentish features can be observed gradually making their appearance in documents of the ninth century.” *OEG*, §5

Indeed, the Kentish dialect is more strikingly different in the ME period than in OE, but earlier Kentish texts are also interesting: some (presumably) Kentish names may be found found in Latin charters (Sweet (1885, §5-8, pps. 428-9); *OEG*, §8) as early as the eight century; and in the ninth century, charters in English begin to appear: of particular importance are ch. 34 and 37-42.

The minor inscriptions, such as the Dover stone, will be omitted: many are entirely without interesting vowel information; others are impossible to localise; finally, it is extremely difficult to determine their age. What we are left with are primarily charters and, later, the Durham Admonition and the so-called Kentish hymn (though it has a strong WS colouring), as well

as the Kentish glosses and Psalm 50 from the same MS.<sup>11</sup>

The Kentish dialect belongs to the south-east of England, and in addition to the texts produced within Kent proper, “[t]he *Codex Aureus* inscription and Sweet’s charter 45 represent the practically identical dialect of Surrey in the same period” (*OEG*, §8), and are included here (indeed, Sweet (1887, VI) lists the *Codex Aureus* inscription as Kentish). After 900, only texts with mixed dialect with WS elements appear (such as the Kentish Hymn); during the periods of Mercian political dominance, Anglian forms are found in Kentish charters. For a discussion on the origins of these — whether through Mercian scribes or copying of Anglian originals — see Bryan (1915).

The Kentish dialect is associated with a fronting of [æ] to [e] (in a separate process from the west Mercian second fronting found in the *VP*), rising diphthongs, and absence of smoothing.

The dialects are also distinguished in terms of lexicon used. One Kentish example is the derived nominal forms for an area of arable land: *sulung* (with various written forms) < *sulh* “plough”.

Grammatically, however, the main difference in eOE is that the first-person singular ending of the verb in *-o* (*u*) is more common than in West Saxon, and that the forms in *-io-*, *-ia-* are more common in Kentish. In charter 42, the forms *cyðo*, *hato*, *biddo*, and *writo* appear next to *selle*; in 37, we find *selle*, *bidde*, and *biddo*. Perhaps the grammatically driven process of replacing the back vowel with *-e* created a back/front opposition in this form which made *-a* equivalent to *-o* and *-u*; it does not appear to have been interchangeable in other grammatical endings, such as the oblique forms of *n*-stems or the strong infinitive of consonant stems (always *-an*, though scarcely attested).

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<sup>11</sup>Cotton Vespasian D.VI, written in the late tenth century. (Dobbie, 1942, Introduction, LXXVIII ff.; 87 ff.)

## 2.1 The Old Kentish data

This section provides first an overview of the texts used; subsequently, a table of the unstressed vowels of commonly occurring forms in Old Kentish is found. Finally, a discussion of less common forms in the individual texts follows (*passim* for the discussion of individual texts in the following chapters on the other three OE dialects).

### 2.1.1 Texts

The following texts are used, based mostly upon the table found in Toon (1992, 427) and reproduced in section 1.1.3. As we can see, the pickings are rather meagre, particularly in the eight and ninth centuries. The table is chronologically organised; the descriptions are grouped for convenience but largely follow the chronology.

#### Charters:

1. Several of the charters edited by Sweet (1885) are of Kentish provenance. Many are preserved only in much later MSS; others are written in Latin and of little use to the student of English. The following (as suggested in *OEG*, §14) are not excluded by these criteria: ch. 34 and 37-42, as well as the endorsements on ch. 28, 30 and 44.
2. Additionally, ch. 45 is from Surrey, and of a piece with the Kentish dialect.

#### The *Codex Aureus* inscription:

This inscription is from “about 870” (Sweet, 1885, 174), and the identification of Aelfred *dux* with the Aelfred of ch. 45 (*idem*, 451) identifies it as being from Surrey.

#### The Durham Admonition:

The same MS contains some Northumbrian glosses, but the Admonition was probably written in the south: “I came to the conclusion that

it was in the *Kentish* dialect of the ninth century, and Prof. Skeat agrees.” (Sweet, 1885, 175-6).

As revealed by the above excerpt, though a Kentish provenance is assumed here too, it is difficult to localise this text with any certainty. It may equally well represent an early West Saxon dialect as a Kentish one.

**Bede Glosses (*OET: Bede*<sup>2</sup>):**

“of the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century, apparently in the Kentish dialect” (*OET*, 179).

***Cotton Vespasian D.vi:***

This MS is of the “late tenth century” (Dobbie, 1942), and contains the *Kentish Hymn* as well as Psalm 50, also printed in Dobbie (1942), immediately following the *Hymn* itself (87 ff.). Also found in the same MS are the *Kentish glosses*, printed in Sweet (1887, 152 ff.), which are extremely useful: most other texts contain only one or two occurrences of each grammatical form; the glosses are much more encompassing.

### 2.1.2 Unstressed vowels in frequently found forms

	gV-	bV-	1sg	pret pl	Gen.sg.	Dat.sg.	AD ca.
Charter 34	ge-	—	—	—	-es	-e	805
Charter 37	ge-	be-	-e, -o	-on	-es	-e	820
Charter 38	ge-	be-	-e	—	-es	-e	831
Charter 39	ge-	be-	-e	—	-es	-e	831
Charter 40	ge-	be-	-e	—	-es	-e	832
Charter 41	ge-	be-	-e	—	-es	-e	835
Charter 42	ge-	be-	-o, -e	—	-es	-e	837
Charter 28	ge-	—	—	-an	-es	-e	858
Charter 30	ge-	—	-o, -u, -e	—	-es	-e	863
Cod. Aureus	ge-	—	-e	—	-es	-e	870
Charter 44	—	be-	—	—	-es	-e	878
Charter 45	ge-	be-	-o, -u	-on, -an	-es	-e	880
Bede <sup>2</sup>	ge-	be-	—	—	-es	-e	900
Durham Adm.	ge-	—	-e	—	-es	-e	900
Kentish H.	ge-	—	—	—	-es	-e	975
Psalms 50	ge-	be-	-e?	-on	-es	-e	975
Kentish Gl.	ge-	be-	e-	-on, -an	-es	-e	975

### 2.1.3 Discussion of less frequent forms

The individual texts contain, of course, some peculiarities which do not fit into the above table. These include the following (line numbers in parentheses where available):

#### Charter 34

1. *æðelnoðo* (2): this form, and many like it, should not be mistaken for an OE grammatical ending; it is a Latin dative: *ego cuðredus ... dabo æðelnoðo ... terram*.
2. *dogor* (16): this unusual form is explained in Wyatt (1929, §25-26).

3. Generally, this charter (as noted in *OEG*, §289) shows an unusual number of *æ* spellings where one normally finds *e* in Kentish, the same is true for Ch. 41.

### Charter 37

1. The variation in the 1sg *-e/-o* does not appear to be caused by subjunctive meaning, and is probably an indication of an ongoing analogical process.
2. The dat.sg. *byrg* (2) shows *i*-Umlaut, but the mutation dative *-i-* itself is gone.
3. The genitive pl. *namon* (43) is unusual; generally, the *n*-stems terminate in *-an* in the oblique and plural. The form may be analogous to the feminine *n*-stems, e.g. *mid vii tungon* (Bosworth and Toller, 1972, “ge-wægnian”, 443), or it may reflect an older state, compare OHG gen. pl. *namno*; in Gothic, the nom.sg. is *namo* (cf. WS *nama*) whereas in the pl. only the acc. form *namna* is attested, cf. OHG acc. pl. *namin*; see also Streitberg (1974, §161), Hirt (1932, §52, vol. II).

### Charter 38 <sup>12</sup>

1. *ðet*, *wes*, etc. are worth noting, as in the other Kentish texts; where WS generally has *-æ-*, Kentish tends towards *-e-*; see *OEG*, §288.
2. *modar*, *broðar*, *dohtar* (12): A nom.sg, gen.sg, and nom.sg, respectively, the *r*-stems appear to have been levelled to *-ar* outside the dative (WS *-or*, dat. *-er*).

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<sup>12</sup>This charter has the curious forms *hlabard* (2) and *hebfað* (7). These are retentions rather than innovations, cf. OHG *hleib*, *haben*, and are a Kentish peculiarity (Colman, 2004). The form *meihanda* (4) < *~mæg-* appears to show very early palatalisation of postvocalic *g*. However, on (11) it appears as *meghond*; note the root vowel alternation in the second constituent *handa/hond*.



**Charter 39**

1. *cirican* (10): here, this word terminates in *-an* as expected, cf. ch. 37 *-on*.

**Charter 40**

1. *wiaralde* (20): This form looks highly unusual next to IWS *we-orold*, *woruld* (though similar root vowel outcomes are found in eWS), but see also *hiabenlice* (22) as well as *agiaban* in ch. 39 (3).

**Charter 41**

1. Generally, this charter preserves a lot of *æ* spellings where *e* is expected, though *deg* (58) next to *ðæm* (59) suggests the distinction was not very clear.
2. *to habanne* 7 *to brucanne* (12): inflected infinitives in *-anne* are found in southern OE next to forms in *enne*; in the VP, only *-enne* is found. Later texts sometimes have *-onne*; in the Kentish glosses, this is the only form found (*OEG*, §735i).

**Charter 42**

1. *noman* (12): see comments on ch. 41.
2. *higon*: a plural of *hiwa*.
3. The 1sg present ind. of the verb here appears to be in free variation between *-o* and *-e*; this is not the case in other forms with unstressed vowels (such as the pretonic prefixes); thus, this text provides strong indications that this is a grammatical process rather than a phonological one.

**Charters 28, 30, and 44**

In ch. 28, *-an* for *-on* is found: *siondan* (18, 25); this suggests that the low back vowel *a* was confused with the high back vowels in the south-east very early. In ch. 30, the 1sg present ind. forms in *-u* and *-o* confuse the two high back vowels, whereas the form *bidde* is a subjunctive: *ic ... bidde þet hit minre sawle nyt gedeo*.

**Codex Aureus (Surrey):**

1. *uncre clæne feo; mid clæne golde* (5): instrumentals (judging by the adjective) in *-e* by analogy from the dat. form. After *uncre*, a weak adjective would be expected; why it is not so cannot be deduced from this text.
2. *noman* (15): the inflectional syllable *-an* is regular.

**Charter 45 (Surrey)**

1. The 1sg present ind. ending in this text is *-o*, except for one occurrence of *-u* (interestingly, on line 1) and one of *-Ø*: *onn* (4).
2. *gðelwalde minum sunu* (23): unambiguously a dative; cf. WS dat. *sunu* in the *u*-stems (but WS also dat.sg. *duru*: OEG, §613).
3. *seondan* (12): another occurrence of *-an* for *-on*.

**Durham Admonition:**

1. *on fæder naman ⁊ on suna naman* (1): these forms match IWS forms (though WS also *fæderes*), both the *r*-stem dative in *-er*, the *u*-stem dative in *-a* and the *n*-stem oblique in *-an*.
2. *ðæt* (1): this form also matches IWS; Kentish more frequently has *ðet*.

3. *for, fer* (4-8): *for* is found on lines 2 and 4; *fer* on 5, 6, 7, and 8. This suggests that the confusion of front and back vowels was active not just in grammatical endings, but in unstressed grammatical words as well. Both *e* and *o* are central vowels, which makes the distance between them shorter than between e.g. *i* and *a*.

### The *Kentish Hymn* and Psalm 50:

1. *Psalm 50* is a curious specimen in terms of dialect. Forms like *heht* (100) appear Anglian, but are common in poetry in other dialects, too (e.g. in Ælfred's *Boethius*). In the 1sg present ind., though forms in *-e* are all that occur, but it is difficult to judge whether these were intended to be subjunctives or whether the forms have fully merged at this stage of the language, or whether *-e* had entirely displaced the forms in *-o*, *-u*.

### The Kentish Glosses:

1. *to burge* (287): the non-mutation dative found here is not unusual, but nevertheless forms a contrast to the mutation form *byrig* (note also the absence of *i*-Umlaut). Sprockel (1965, 78) notes that in WS, the dat.sg. *-burge* commonly appears as a compound while the simplex is more commonly *byrig*.
2. The 1sg present ind. is always *-e*, making this the only form occurring in this MS.
3. Latin subjunctives are often translated as indicatives, possibly reflecting native idiom.

## 2.2 Tendencies in Old Kentish

As illustrated in the above table, as well as in the subsequent commentary, Kentish is remarkably stable throughout the attested period - the explana-

tion for this may be partly its geographical proximity to West Saxon, which would come to dominate as a literary language until the Norman conquest; eWS also shows several typically “Kentish” traits (-*io*-, -*ia*- root vowels; back-vowel endings in the 1sg present ind.), and there is reason to believe that the dialects would have had similar developments independently of each other even if they were geographically more divided (Samuels, 1971).

The tendencies that do emerge are a drift towards 1sg present ind. endings in -*e* (though this in all likelihood is not a phonological process, but a grammatical one: *OEG*, §735) and a confusion between *u* and *o* in the grammatical endings -*on*/-*un*, -*ong*/-*ung*; the *n*-stems generalised the forms in -*an* rather than -*on* (but see *OEG*, §377).

## 2.3 Later developments in Kentish

In Middle Kentish, the plural formation of the *n*-stems spread to other noun classes. Whereas in the north only words like *eyen*, *oxen* and *schon* form their plurals with -*n*, a long list of examples from the southern dialects is found in Morris (1866, xi ff.); an example of another stem type with generalised -*n* inflection in ModE “brethren”, cf. northern *brether* (Franks Casket: *gibroþær*) and the early loss of -*n* (e.g. on the Ruthwell Cross).

The southern dialect long preserved non-*s* forms of the genitive in the feminine and the plural. Another conservative trait is the retention of the strong/weak adjective declensions (Morris, 1866, xxxvi), which merged in the north.

The st pret pl. is generally -*en*, though the -*n* is sometimes dropped (as in the Midlands dialects); so, too, with the past participle in the sg.

The unstressed vowels are all -*e*, except for the prefix eKentish *ge*- > MKentish *i*-, *y*- (though this is probably a retention rather of the palatalised consonant than of the vowel) (Morris, 1866, lxv); other exceptions are found in the derivational forms, e.g. the participial forms in -*ing(e)*, -*ying(e)* as well as -*ind(e)*<sup>13</sup> and the adjectival -*lich* (*OEG*, §371). This mirrors the

<sup>13</sup>On the distribution of the various forms of the present participle in mediaeval English, see McIntosh et al. (1986, vol. I, 391-2); on the later spread of the -*ing* forms,

development in MHG, and is probably a result of half-stress (see discussion and references in section 6.1.1).

In general, when comparing the language of the *Ayenbite of Inwyrt* to texts of similar age from other parts of the country, and particularly the North, the most striking difference in the inflectional system is the number of categories which have been retained. Though the inflectional vowel is always -e- apart from in derivational suffixes, the fact that it has not been dropped suggests a conservative system, and possibly one where the phonetic contrast in unstressed syllables was retained comparatively late.

Notably in the modern dialect of Kent, initial unstressed syllables are often dropped (Wright, 1905, §232); compare the relatively late retention of OE *ge-* (ME *y-*) in the south-western dialects (Sisam (1967, 292); see further section 5.3), though this may be a result of London English spreading south (cf. also the recent development of “Estuary English”).

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Jespersen (1905, §207) writes: “The coalescence in form of the verbal substantive and of the present participle is, of course, one of the chief factors of this development.” See further Sisam (1967, 290).



# Chapter 3

## Mercian

Mercian and Northumbrian, which is treated separately following this section, constitute the Anglian dialects of OE. Of the two Anglian dialects, Merc. is defined not by its special traits, but rather by the absence of the various specifically Northumbrian. features. Another distinction between Northumbrian and Mercian is the type of texts available to us: whereas in Northumbria primarily short inscriptions are found, we find in Mercian the encompassing *Vespasian Psalter* (VP).<sup>14</sup>

The hallmark feature of the Anglian dialects is the so-called 'smoothing': see *OEG* (§222-233), Bülbring (1902, §193 ff.).

Since this feature groups Mercian and Northumbrian into Anglian, it will not be repeated in the following chapter on Northumbrian (page 37).

### 3.1 The Old Mercian data

The earliest Mercian language is known mostly from charters, but Campbell (1969, §10) considers all but eight to be later than 900. The English place-names found in the remaining six are generally of little use for the

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<sup>14</sup>The Kentish provenance of the MS and its Mercian language has been the cause of some discussion: Zeuner (1881) suggests that the language, too, is Kentish; later, suggestions such as a Kentish scribe copying a Mercian original MS have come to be more accepted (Ball, 1970).

consideration of unstressed vowels other than derivational suffixes and connecting vowels.

Though the data from the *VP* is very important to the study of the Mercian dialects, it must be noted that it represents a subdialect different from that found in many other Mercian texts: the hallmark feature is the second fronting (*OEG*, §259; §164-9).

### 3.1.1 Texts

The following texts (chronologically organised) are used:

#### Glossaries:

1. An important source Mercian (though they represent divergent subdialects) is the language of the glosses and glossaries that have come down to us. The most important is the *VP*, edited by Sweet (1885, 183-420), who describes it as being "mainly in a very fine hand, which cannot well be earlier or later than the first half of the ninth century, and this date is fully supported by the language, which shows a remarkably consistent type, uniformly but not excessively archaic" (*idem*, 184).
2. The *Corpus* glossary, from the "eight to ninth century" (Lowe, as cited in *OEG*, §12) is the oldest glossary available to us, and "more convenient and less clumsy than that of Épinal" (Sweet, 1885, 3).
3. The Épinal glossary, in a continental hand, represents very archaic language, though the MS is later than that of *Corpus*.
4. As with Épinal, the Erfurt glossary is in a continental hand, copied by a scribe who "was evidently unacquainted with English, as shown by his constant errors, and his nationality is unmistakeably betrayed by the intrusion of several OHG words" (Sweet, 1885, 4). In the table in section 4.2.2. it will be listed under the Épinal headword due to their similarity; any striking



differences will be discussed independently in the section following the table.

5. The Leiden glossary, as with the Erfurt glossary, was written "by a High German scribe" (*ibid*); "the scribe excuses himself by the remark at the end, *sicut inveni scripsi, ne reputes scriptori*" (*idem*, 5). Like the Corpus, Épinal, and Erfurt glossaries, it is reproduced in *OET* (111-121); a more complete edition is that of Hessels (2011). Like the Erfurt glossary, it is listed under the Épinal headword, for its accidentance does not significantly differ from either of the two.
6. The Lorica glosses and the Lorica prayer, both from the same MS., are difficult to localise: Sweet (*idem*, 171-2) believes them to be Kentish, while Campbell (1969, §12) writes that they are "not rich in decisive dialect forms, but to be regarded as Mercian"; so, too, with the glosses to the Blickling Psalter (*OET*, 122). These will all be included in the Mercian chapter here, but the uncertainty regarding their provenance must be kept in mind.
7. The Rushworth glosses (Mercian), conventionally Ru<sup>1</sup>, are much later — Toon (1992, 427) suggests 975 — published by Skeat, they are reproduced by Sweet (1887, 125 ff.).

#### Charters:

1. Original charters of Mercian origin are ch. 47 and 48 (*OEG*, §10).
2. Ch. 9-14 contain English place- and personal names only, but will nonetheless be examined.

### 3.1.2 Unstressed vowels in frequently found forms

In the Mercian dialect in particular, it must be kept in mind that forms found in the charters represent few occurrences, whereas those in the *VP*

may represent hundreds.

	gV-	bV-	1sg	pret pl	Gen.sg.	Dat.sg.	AD ca.
Épinal	gi-	bi-	-u	-un (-on)	-es	-e (-i)	700
Corpus	ge-	bi-	-o (-u)	-un (-on)	-es	-e (-i)	725
Blickling	ge-	—	—	—	—	-e?	725
Ch. 9 - 14	—	bi-	—	—	-es	-æ?	737-802
VP	ge-	bi-	-o (-u)	-un (-on)	-es	-e	825
Lorica gl.	ge-	be-	-o	—	-es	—	825
Lorica pr.	ge-	bi-	—	-on	-es	—	825
Charter 47	ge-	bi-	—	—	-es	-e	836
Charter 48	ge-	bi-	-e	-un	-es	-e	840
Ru <sup>1</sup>	ge-	be-	-e	-un, -on/-an	-es	-e (-æ)	975

### 3.1.3 Discussion of less common forms

#### The Épinal Glossary

1. *gi-*: an unusual form in Mercian, but the most common one in the Épinal glossary: it appears 40 times, whereas *ge-* appears 14 times; *gy-* is found once (Dieter, 1885, 46). Similarly, *bi-* is found frequently while *\*be-* is not found (*ibid*).
2. The 1sg present ind. in *-u* occurs once.
3. *-un* is by far the most common st pret pl. ending; *-on* (MS: <or>) occurs once (*idem*, 68).
4. The dative terminates in *-e*; instrumentals in *-i* are found in the *ja-* and *wa-*stems (*idem*, 80; 82), cf. *Corpus*.

#### The *Corpus* Glossary

1. The pretonic prefix *ge-* outnumbers *gi-* 150 to one; *be-* does not occur, whereas *bi-* is frequent. (Dieter, 1885, §29).

2. In the 1sg present ind., forms in *-o* and *-u* are in free variation. So too for the st pret pl. ind., though *-un* is slightly more common there. The gen.sg. is *-es*; the *n*-stems have *-an* (once: *-on*).
3. The dative, under which is included the instrumental in the above table, is interesting. The forms in *-i* appear to be instrumentals (Dieter, 1885, 79); thus, they appear not to reflect the inherited WGmc. instrumental (*\*-u*, cf. OHG *-u*) but rather a dative form with confusion of the front vowels, cf. Ruthwell *rodi* — though *rodi* is a feminine *ō*-stem whereas in *Corpus* the *-i* ending is found on masculine *a*-stems.

### The *Blickling* Glosses

1. *berende* (3): though this form could be a noun in the dative or plural, the word which it glosses, *fecundae* (which could also be a dative or a plural), makes it much more likely a present participle.
2. *tinde bogan* (18): though this glosses *tetenderunt arcem* (plural perfect), *bogan* is probably to be read as an infinitive and not as a st pret pl.

### Charters 9-14:

1. Ch. 9 (736 AD): No interesting unstressed vowels, though the reference to a *rex suutanglorum* may be of interest from a philological point of view.
2. Ch. 13 (770): the *-æ* in final position in *saluuerpæ* is unusual: here, *-e* would be expected.
3. Ch. 14 (779): This text has two genitive singular forms in *-es*.

### The Vespasian Psalter

1. Prefixes, Zeuner (1881, 62): always *ge-*; 200 *bi-* as against 20 *be-*).
2. The 1sg present ind. of the strong thematic verbs is “-*u*, daneben findet sich vereinzelt -*o* und ganz selten -*a* und -*e*.” (*idem*, 92-3); ie. 99 occurrences of -*u*, 7 -*o*, and one -*a*; “die formen auf -*e* ...sind möglicherweise gar nicht die indik.-formen, sondern konjunktive, indem der übersetzer die futurformen auf -*am* mit dem konj. verwechselte.” (*ibid*). In the weak verbs, -*o* is more common, particularly in the *ja*-verbs; one form has -*a*, and two forms have -*e* — “diese beiden formen lassen sich nicht als konj. auffassen, es liegt also hier wirklich die (im ws. gewöhnliche) indikativendung -*e* vor.”

The -*e* form is spreading, whereas the back vowels *u* and *o* in particular are confused. It is interesting that forms in *a* appear; this may perhaps indicate the next stage of the vowel merger.

3. The st pret pl. is “durchaus -*un*: gegenüber 235 -*un* finden sich nur 16 -*on*” (*idem*, 98); the situation in the present (e.g. *sindon*, *sindun*) mirrors the preterite. No forms in -*an* are found.
4. The dat.sg is -*e*; an instrumental in -*a* appears rarely (Zeuner, 1881, 120). The *n*-stems have -*an* throughout.

### The Lorica glosses

*ic sio wegen* (74): this glosses *vehor* (-*ar*), making it either “I am being carried” (present) or “I will be carried” (future).

### The Lorica Prayer

1. Sweet classifies this text as Kentish (*OET*, 174), whereas in the *OEG* (§12), it is regarded as Mercian: but as stated in the *OEG*, they are not rich in decisive forms, and may originate from a Mercian scribe in Kent or from a dialect otherwise not attested. For example, the form *deg* is commonplace in Kentish, but is also

found in the *VP*; the rising diphthong found in *iorðan* could also belong to either dialect.

2. The *n*-stems all terminate in *-an*; the form *nomān* has seen some discussion already. Of forms in *ge-* there are several; *bi-* occurs once (10).

#### Charter 47

1. *in heanbyrg* (1): the dat.sg. form shows *i*-Umlaut, but the *-i-* has been syncopated; see, however, *aet heanbyrig* (13-14).
2. *aet*, *ðæm*, *ðæs* (9, 10): cf. the Kentish forms with *-e-* as well as *ðes* (9) in the same charter.
3. *ðy* (13): the particle WS *þe*.

#### Charter 48

1. *hiobanne* 7 *to siollanne* (2-3): note the inflected infinitive in *-anne*.
2. *werun* (17): “nearly illegible from wear” (Sweet, 1885, 454, note 2).

#### Rushworth Glosses (Ru<sup>1</sup>)

1. The Ru<sup>1</sup> shows a remarkable amount of mixing of the back vowels: though the st pret pl. is generally (121 occurrences) *-un*, *-on* appears 55 times and *-an* 39. Additionally, *-en* and *-aen* make up 9 occurrences (Brown, 1892, 49-50).
2. The gen.sg. is usually *-es*, though rarely *-as*, *-os* (*idem*, 71).
3. The dat.sg. is usually *-e*, though rarely *-æ* (*ibid*).
4. The *n*-stems terminate in *-an*, *ibid*, 79 ff.

5. The prefixes are all be *Ce-*, though *be-* is not well attested. See, however, Sweet (1887, 143).
6. The gen.pl. of *dæg* appears in the forms *-ena*, *-ona*, *-ana* (*OEG*, §572), as in some late Northumbrian texts.

## 3.2 Tendencies in Old Mercian

As illustrated in the above table, the interchange between *u* and *o* is attestable throughout the OE period. This is the case not just in the endings shown in the table, and can hardly be seen as anything else than a phonological merger of these two Gmc. phonemes in the unstressed syllables.

As far as the dat./loc. forms are concerned, it would be careless to attribute the *-i*-forms to phonological confusion of all unstressed *e/i* vowels: the situation in the pretonic prefixes suggests that *e* and *i* were indeed separate throughout the period (as *ge-* and *bi-* are the forms normally found), though Épinial *gi-* is an anomaly.<sup>15</sup> The prefixes appear to have been following a different development than the vowels found in final syllables.

The (infrequent) *-as*-spellings of the gen.sg. in the Rushworth glosses suggests that [a], too, was being approximated to the [o]~[u] continuum.

In the front vowels, *e* and *æ* are sometimes confused; going by the above explanation for *i* and *e*, this suggests two distinct front vowel phonemes, one high (~[i]) and one low-mid ([e]~[æ]).

## 3.3 Later developments in Mercian

Mercia encompasses what is now (and was during the ME period) the Midlands. This means that the Midlands dialect which would later flourish in London is largely a continuant of the Mercian dialect, and that the same is true for the ModE standard language. The later texts examined for the Mercian (i.e. Midlands) dialect in the ME period are the Peterborough

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<sup>15</sup>Possibly, the forms found in Épinial may be explained geographically, cf. the table for the Northumbrian dialect in section 4.1.2.

Chronicle and the *Orrmulum* from the East Midlands and the *Ancrene Wisse* from the West Midlands (see the map in section 1.1.2).

The Peterborough Chronicle partially retains the contrast of the st pret pl. (-*on* 126, -*en* 56, -*an* 45) and the st ppl (-*en* 109, -*on* 13, -*an* 11), but there are obvious signs of confusion, and the merger to *ə* was probably well underway even in this twelfth-century text (Krygier, 1994).

The *Orrmulum*, also of the twelfth century, is clearly the most divergent of these texts. Orm has devised his own writing system, and his language is also notable for having many loan-words of ON origin and few of French. While the unstressed vowels in the grammatical endings are all *e* (e.g. infinitive, st pret pl. -*enn*), notably the prefix *bi-* retains the *i*-vocalism found in Old Mercian.

In the *Ancrene Wisse* — also: *Ancrene Riwe* — of the early thirteenth century is written in the AB language first recognised by Tolkien (1929), “an English older than Dan Michel’s and richer, as regular in spelling as Orm’s but less queer; one that has preserved something of its former cultivation. . . . This is the language first and foremost of the Corpus Christi MS. of the *Ancrene Wisse* (106). Characteristic of this language is “the weakening of unaccented vowels to *e*” (118); see also Tolkien’s (1962) edition of the text.

Based on this very limited sample size, the levelling to *ə* was largely completed by 1300, though some areas in the central midlands (around Peterborough) may have retained a contrast between front and back vowels. This would be supported by the accidentence found in the fourteenth-century Ashburnham XXVII MS as reproduced in Sisam (1967, 117 ff.).

Notably, the Midlands dialects distinguish the endings of the 3sg present ind. and the pl. present ind.: in the North, both endings had become -*es*, whereas in the south, both forms had become -*eþ*; the Midlands dialects had 3sg present ind. -(*e*)*þ* and pl. present ind. forms in -*en* (Brunner, 1953, 74), cf. the distinction in ModE: -*s*/-*Ø*.





# Chapter 4

## Northumbrian

Northumbrian shares with Mercian the Anglian smoothing of diphthongs (see page 27); it is defined as a dialect apart from Mercian by several unique features, some of which encompass the unstressed syllables.

1. The loss of final *-n*: not uncommonly, final *-n* following an unstressed vowel, particularly *-u-*, will fade. Such is the case with the st pret pl. verb forms (commonly Northumbrian *-u*), the word “seven” (PsScho-  
lia: *sifu*), and *n*-stems (Ruthwell Cr.: *galgu*).<sup>16</sup>
2. /æ/ > /a/ before *rC* (“but invades some Mercian texts”, *OEG* §258: §144).
3. Products of the second fronting are rarely found in Northumbrian.
4. “The chief dialectal distinction arising from vowel contraction is the development of diphthongs with mid or high first elements and unrounded second elements, *e+a*, *i+a* in North. and *VP*, §238” (*OEG*, §264).
5. Campbell (1969, §260) writes: “W-S and North. are distinguished from Kt. and Merc. by much more extensive diphthongization of vow-

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<sup>16</sup>The connection between Old Northumbrian loss of final *-n* (e.g. *sibu* and that in Old Norse is tempting (e.g. *siau* — both forms in opposition to e.g. WS *seofon* and ModE “seven”), but this appears anachronistic and unnecessary: the Ruthwell cross is pre-viking, and ON did in any event not lose the 3pl.pret ending *-un*.

els by the influence of preceding palatal consonants . . . This agreement of North. with W-S against the intervening Merc. is puzzling from the point of view of dialect geography". But it need not be, see Samuels (1971, particularly 4-5) (explaining another problem, but making a point which is equally relevant to this one): "The late appearance of correspondences does not prove that there was no original connection. Phonetic change is determined largely by the suprasegmental features of juncture, stress, pitch and intonation, which are never recorded in early writings. The same change may appear, therefore, centuries after the two groups of speakers have separated, yet be the result of the same conditioning factors that have been operating ever since the separation."

#### The Northumbrian dialect

is above all to be identified by means of the inscription in runes on the Ruthwell Cross, a bulky monument<sup>17</sup> which belongs to a spot in the heart of Northumbrian territory (Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire). General linguistic agreement with this inscription allows us to regard as Northumbrian a number of short pieces of the same, or perhaps of a slightly earlier, period: the two earliest MSS of Cædmon's Hymn, the earliest MSS of Bede's Death-song and of the Leiden Riddle, and the runic inscriptions of the Franks Casket (*OEG*, §4).

This constitutes the early section of the Northumbrian corpus<sup>18</sup>, though the Bewcastle Column<sup>19</sup> may be added to the list; of the later texts, the

<sup>17</sup>Howlett (1997, 290) is more generous than Campbell: "The Ruthwell Cross, one of the most glorious relics of Anglo-Saxon culture, exhibits an extensive programme of sculpture, the longest extant series of Anglo-Latin inscriptions, the longest Old English runic inscription, and the most beautiful poem in the Old Northumbrian dialect, which exhibits Biblical style in the disposition of its metrical forms, words, and runes."

<sup>18</sup>Other minor inscriptions have been tied to the pre-migration Anglian dialects: an example of this is the Undley bracteate, on which Nielsen (1991a) finds "no linguistic evidence to support a Schleswig (or Angeln) origin". In any case, items found on the continent which cannot with certainty be linked to OE and its dialects are excluded here.

<sup>19</sup>It was dated by Sweet (1885, 124) to "? 670". Later scholarship puts it slightly later: Page (1995, 47-70) posits a date of 750-850 as "possible" on linguistic grounds; according

Durham Ritual, the Lindisfarne Gospels, and Ru<sup>2</sup> will be examined.

## 4.1 The Old Northumbrian data

The most remarkable problem of the corpus of the Northumbrian dialect is that while the early and late texts are, in fact, represented rather well, there is a 150-year hiatus in the data set; what happened between these two groups of texts can only be inferred.

### 4.1.1 Texts

The following texts have been examined, based upon the table reproduced in section 1.1.3. As usual, they are listed chronologically, with the oldest texts appearing first.

#### The Franks Casket:

This magnificent casket, made from whale's bone<sup>20</sup> and silver decorations and hinges (which are now gone) is presently in the British Museum, apart from the right panel, which is in the Bargello museum. The casket bears carvings of what appears to be Germanic tradition, Celtic mythology, a Christian adoration, as well as graeco-roman imagery. The runes are legible and bear their usual values (except on the right panel, which is discussed in the commentary on unusual forms), and some Latin script is also found; both scripts are used alternately for English and Latin.

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to Campbell (1969, 4) it can "be assigned to the eight century without hazard"

<sup>20</sup>Eichner (1990) points out that in the inscription *hranæs ban*, *hran* "könnte auch ein ganz anderes Tier bezeichnen, nämlich das Walroß, und das Kästchen könnte aus Knochen (vielleicht Stoßzähnen) des Walrosses geschnitzt sein"); this may be possible (and is supported by the opposition *hron-* : *hual-* in the PsScholia glosses, i.e. contemporary Northumbrian usage; see further the reference to clearly different animals in *Ohthere* (Batley, 1980, 15.15 ff.), though *hwales bane*), but unlikely given the size of the casket: the largest panel measures 22.9 by 19 centimetres.

I would like to thank Arne Bjørge at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research for confirming this: "Det er nok mulig å finne hvalbein med en diameter som er stor nok for å danne flater på 23 x 19 cm (for eksempel underkjevebein på retthval). Hvalrossen har ingen bein eller tenner som er store nok til de målene du oppgir." (e-mail correspondence, April 25th, 2014).

**The Bewcastle Column:**

This very early runic monument, presently in St Cuthbert's churchyard in northern Cumbria, contains a shortish runic inscription of 13 lines as printed in Sweet (1887, 86); the column and the contemporary Ruthwell cross have been referred to as "the greatest achievement of their date in the whole of Europe" (Pevsner, 1967).

**The Ruthwell Cross:**

The Ruthwell cross bears an inscription connected with the poem *The Dream of the Rood*, attested elsewhere no earlier than in the 10th century Vercelli book. It stands now in Dumfriesshire in Scotland, and has been noted for archaic language as well as for its aesthetics. Sweet's editions in *OET* (125) and 1887 (p. 97) give a useful impression of the difficulty in reading the cross; a reconstruction of the poem is found in Ball (1991, 112-3); see also Howlett (2005, 208 ff.). The line numbers referred to in the subsequent discussion are those used by Sweet (1887).

**PsScholia:**

Though it provides only a few glosses to various psalms, the text is interesting because of its age. It has been edited and published by Napier (1900, §54).

**Bede Glosses:**

The Bede glosses (*Arula* : *hearth*; *destina* : *feurstud*; *jugulum* : *sticung*, Bede<sup>1</sup>, *OET* 123) represent too little material to warrant inclusion beyond this list.

**Cædmon's *Hymn*:**

Of this hymn — the first produced by Cædmon, and the only one preserved — four copies in the Northumbrian dialect exist next to a later WS translation. The exemplar found in the Moore MS is the oldest, "written about 737" (Sweet, 1984, 181), see also Bede's account of the poet Cædmon, *idem*, 45-50.

**Bede's Death Song:**

The oldest MS (St. Gall 254) is of the ninth century (*idem*, 182), “evidently an accurate copy of an Old Northumbrian original” (*OET*, 149). Line references are to Sweet (1984, 183).

**The Leiden Riddle:**

“The riddle is written at the end of the MS. Voss 106 ... in [a] continental hand of the 9th century”; “evidently a direct copy of an Old Northumbrian original” (*OET*, 149-150). It is a “translation of Aldhelm’s riddle *De lorica*” (Sweet, 1984, 183); line references *ibid*.

**The Rushworth Glosses (Ru<sup>2</sup>):**

The Northumbrian Rushworth glosses, conventionally Ru<sup>2</sup>, represent the language of southern Northumbria in the 10th century; see Lindelöf (1901).

**The Lindisfarne Gospels:**

These glosses were produced “by Aldred the priest in the second half of the tenth century, probably at Chester-le-Street, Durham” (Sweet, 1984, 215); their accidentance has been thoroughly examined by Ross (1937).

**The Durham Ritual**

Lindelöf (1890, Preface, ii-iii) writes: “Die Handschrift des Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis befindet sich in der Bibliothek der Domkirche zu Durham, wo sie mit A. IV. 19 bezeichnet ist ... Über die mundartliche Stellung des Rit. ist soviel ich weiss immer nur eine Meinung ausgesprochen worden. Die charakteristischen Eigentümlichkeiten des northumbrischen Dialektes ... treten sogar bei einer oberflächlichen Betrachtung der Glosse gleich zum Vorschein.” Toon (1992, 427) dates the gloss to around AD 975.

### 4.1.2 Unstressed vowels in frequently found forms

	gV-	bV-	1sg	pret pl	Gen.sg.	Dat.sg.	AD ca.
Franks C.	gi-	—	—	—	-es	-e (-i)	675
Bewcastle	ge-	—	—	-on	-es	—	700
Ruthwell	gi-	bi-	—	-un	-æs	-æ, -i	700
PsScholia	—	—	—	-u	-aes	-e	725
Cædmon	gi-	—	—	-un	-æs	-e/-æ	737
BDS	—	—	—	—	-aes	-ae (-e)	750
Leiden R.	gi-	bi-	-æ	-un	—	-æ	750
Ru <sup>2</sup>	gi- (ge-)	bi-	-o (-u, -e)	-un (-on)	-es	-e	975
Lindisf.	ge-	be-	-o (-a, -e)	—	-es	-e (-o)	970
Durham R.	gi- (ge-)	bi- (be-)	-o ((-e))	-on	-es (-æs)	-e (-æ/-i)	975

### 4.1.3 Discussion of less frequent forms

#### The Bewcastle Column:

1. The stressed vowels are largely conventional: as in other OE dialects, the neuter nom./acc. demonstrative *þis* shows an *-i*-vocalism (like OF), as opposed to the north and southwest Gmc. outcomes with *-e*- (OI *þessi*, OHG *deser*)
2. *þecn* (2): note the monosyllabicity of this form; the second vowel of ModE *token* is a later addition, as is that of ModG *Zeichen* (compare also OI *tákn*). The word *-burug* is polysyllabic - not a particularly common outcome in eOE, but see also the uncommon OHG *buruc* as well as section 6.1.2.
3. The adjective *þun* “slender” is also somewhat unusual: the form usually found in WS is *þyn(ne)*, but the Bewcastle form is a neuter singular in concordance with *þecn* (with strong declension appositively), and thus a reflex of Gmc. *\*þunnu*, a *u*-stem. The later forms may be the result of a generalisation of the plural,

oblique, or feminine forms - or simply from the weak declension - and thus show the *i*-Umlaut lacking here.

4. *aft Alcfriþu* (3): “In its more usual senses *æfter* can govern three cases, the accusative, dative, and instrumental. ...the accusative usage is found quite frequently in certain Northumbrian texts. ...the ending of the following name [on the early main inscription of Bewcastle] has an unusual rune or bind-rune form which has not yet been satisfactorily deciphered” (Page, 1995, 17, 20).
5. *kyniq* (4), *kyninges* (6), *kyng* (11); *burug* (9): interesting and inconsistent svarabhakti vowels (see on the king-word also Pieper (1991, 357)).

#### The Ruthwell Cross:

1. *-æ* (1, passim): The *-e* in final position is usually *-æ* in Old Northumbrian; here, due to the weathered state of the monument, we cannot be quite certain of its manifestation; see Page (1995, 29 ff.).
2. *galgu* (2): an old *an*-stem, this ought probably to be equvalated to *foldu*, also an acc.sg. *n*-stem (Cædmon’s *Hymn*, Leningrad MS) - the loss of final *-n* is not unheard of in Northumbrian (Ball, 1991, 120), but the vowel nonetheless tends to appear rather as *-a(n)*.
3. *rodi* (11): perhaps the most famous unstressed vowel in OE, this form has been the subject of much debate. Ball (1991, 121) believes it to be an error; but this aside, there are other options to be considered. Either, it shows a confusion of /e/ and /i/, i.e. a phonological process, or there is a grammatical explanation, e.g. that the form is a distinct locative form rather than a dative. The better explanation seems to be a phonological process where the front vowels *e* and *i* were confused (as happened also in the

3sg present ind.: Franks *-iþ*; later *-eþ*). This confusion also included the low front vowel *æ*, which is supported by the frequent *æ*-spellings in Northumbrian of the gen.sg and the dat.sg. *æ*, *e*, and *i*-spellings are found in both the prefixes and in the gen./dat.sg. In the same inscription *blodæ* (instrumental) is found; this suggests that all three front vowels were confused very early.

Another option entirely is to postulate an origin where *blodæ* < OE dat. and *rodi* < Gmc. locative (see also Bammesberger (1994)), only one of those cases would have to be merged with the dative for the attested forms on the Ruthwell cross to be consistent with this view. The *-i* locative (“locative” here in the functional sense rather than necessarily the formal sense) *romæcæstri* on the Franks Casket (left panel) would support the view that the locative was distinct, whereas the instrumental was formally merged with the dative; further, an inherited locative resulting in OE *-i* is not unthinkable considering the PIE locative *\*(e/o)i*.

The problems with positing a distinct OE locative are the following: (1) the inflectional vowels are confused elsewhere, and make for uncertain evidence; (2) there are very few possible attestations even within OE; and (3) other Gmc. languages do not have locative forms; the nearest languages which have attested locative forms are Latin (sparingly, but e.g. *domi*) and Greek (again, sparingly, but e.g. *pólēi* or Homeric *ēōthen*). There may have been a locative in Celtic, but it is not attested as such in Old Irish (McCone (1978) connects the PIE locative *\*-i* to the short dative).

4. *kwomu* (12): st pret pl. with loss of *-n*, cf. *galgu*.

#### The Franks Casket:

1. One significant problem in examining the vowels on the Franks



Casket is the comparative strangeness of the vowel symbols on the right panel (on which see e.g. Eichner (1991, 608)).

The central controversy of this issue is the form *on harmbergV*, where the final vowel may be either *-a* (Page, 1973, 178-9) or “in Hinblick auf *in romæcæstri* der Romulusplatte und auf *on bergi* auf dem Kreuz Thornhill III [9. Jh.] natürlich als *-be<sub>2</sub>rgi<sub>4</sub>* aufzulösen ist, aber doch auch als *-be<sub>2</sub>rgæ<sub>2</sub>* noch akzeptabel erschien” (Eichner, 1991, 609).

2. *romæcæstri*: the final vowel here may be considered together with Ruthwell *rodi*. Whether this is, in fact, two words *romæcæstri* with a Latin gen. *romae* as the first constituent (rather than a native English compound) is arguable (Bammesberger, 1991, 631), but reading *cæstri* as a Latin gen. makes little sense in this context. As with *rodi* on the Ruthwell Cross, a locative form is theoretically possible, but confusion of the front vowels is the better explanation.

#### PsScholia:

There is not a lot of material here; it may be noting, if nothing else, that the loss of final *-n* is found throughout (*sifu*, *fyllu*), and that /a/ > /o/ before *n* (*hron-*) in stressed syllables, cf. *Franks Casket*. The form *hiru* “indeed” is problematic: Holthausen (1934, “huru”).

#### Cædmon’s *Hymn*:

1. *scylun* (1): This form has been cited as evidence for OE pro-drop; however, this need not be an example of pro-drop: see Mitchell (1985).
2. *hergan* (1): This is the form of the Moore MS; Leningrad has *herga*.
3. *hrofe* (6): cf. Leningrad *hrofæ*.
4. *middungeard* (7): Interestingly, Leningrad has *middingeard* here. The Gmc. *ja*-stem *\*midjaz* (Gothic *midjis*, *midjungards*) tends

to produce *-i-* (OS *middilgard*, OHG *mittingeard*) in WGmc.; WS has *middangeard* (Sweet, 1984, 47), arguably making the Lenin-grad form the most phonologically regular outcome in OE; Moore *-un* and WS *-an* may be explained by analogy to the *n*-stems, whose vocalism they equvalate in their respective dialects.

5. *foldu* (Moore: *fold<sup>v</sup>*) (9): an *n*-stem, Northumbrian *n*-loss in the acc. and the same vocalism in the unstressed syllable as seen in *galgu* (Ruthwell Cr.).

### Bede's Death Song:

The retention of *-i-* in the 3sg present ind. ending is worth noting; it is also found on e.g. the Franks Casket (twice, both on the righth panel, though see the discussion above on the vowel symbols of that particular panel).

### The Leiden Riddle:

1. *eorðu* (11): an *n*-stem with loss of final *-n*. Note that final *-n* is not always lost in the Leiden Riddle; intervocalic position may help preserve it. Alternatively, one may argue that the word is not an *n*-stem in this text.<sup>21</sup>
2. The 1sg present in *-æ* is the only early 1sg form in early Northumbrian; unfortunately it may be a subjunctive.

### The Rushworth Glosses:

1. The prefixes *gi-*, *bi-* are by far the more frequent forms. Whereas *ge-* occurs in 6-7% of the cases (Lindelöf, 1901, 79), *be-* is not found once. Once, a syncopated form *groefa* is found.

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<sup>21</sup>This word appears to have had both strong and weak paradigms at the time of WGmc. splitting into the daughter languages: cf. ModG *auf Erden*, but otherwise an *a*-stem, and the twin paradigms in OS (dat. *erthu* : *erthun*); in Gothic, the dative is *airpai*, i.e. either the weak inflection is a WGmc. innovation, or both paradigms existed in common Gmc. and Gothic generalised the strong inflection.

2. The st pret pl. in *-un* occurs about 500 times; *-on* around 90.
3. The *n*-stems generally terminate in *-a*, though some forms in *-o*, *-u* are found. The form *sade* may be considered an error (for it appears but once); in the acc., *-a* appears more common. In the nom./acc. pl., *-u* appears 33 times, *-o* 17, and *-a* 7; *-æ* and *-e* both appear once (Lindelöf, 1901, 114-5).

The back vowels appear to be confused; the spread of *-a-* may be a result of WS influence, though for some reason it is less common in the plural - perhaps false analogy from the dat.pl. in *-um*.

4. The 1sg present ind. has the following distribution: *-o* is found 200 times; *-u* 2; *-e* 4; *-a* once.

#### The Lindisfarne Gospels:

1. The nom./acc.pl. neut. *n*-stems end in *-o*; the acc.sg. of *monno* appears as *monne* in 5% of the cases (Ross, 1937, 35).
2. The dat.sg. normally appears as *-e*, but six times, a form in *-o* is found. A confusion of [e] and [o] is not supported given the regularity of gen.sg. *-es* and of the Northumbrian dative in general (consistently *-æ* and *-e*), so too with the st pret pl. *-un*, *-on*; [u] and [o] are, however, confused in nearly every early Northumbrian text, and a shared origin with the OHG, OS instrumentals in *-u* cannot be conclusively dismissed (Ross, 1937, 54-5).
3. One gen.pl. appears as *taceno*; Ross (1937, 33) considers this an “obvious archaism”.

#### The Durham Ritual:

1. In the Durham Ritual, it is particularly interesting that the st pret pl. forms in *-un* are entirely absent.

2. In the dat.sg., the ending is usually *-e*; “[d]aneben kommen als Endungen vor: *æ* in *heofnæ* 194,16 und *-i* (wahrscheinlich eine alte Locativform): *dægi* ...u. *voegi* 168, 6 (Skeat). 171, 4” (Lindelöf, 1890, 103); see the previous comments on possible locative forms on the Ruthwell Cross, Franks Casket inscriptions.
3. In the *n*-stems, the “Gen. Dat. Acc. Sg. u. Nom. Acc. Plur gehen auf verschiedene Vocale aus” (*idem*, 114); the gen.sg. frequently has *-es* by analogy from the *a*-stems.

## 4.2 Tendencies in Old Northumbrian

The most striking facts that emerge from the above study of the Northumbrian unstressed vowels is that forms in *æ* and *e* are confused throughout the period in the gen./dat.sg forms, whereas *æ* is never confused with the *i* of the pretonic prefixes (only the Bewcastle column has <e> once).

Later, the prefixes start to show *e*; only in the Durham Ritual does *i* appear in the dat.sg. This may indicate one high and one low front vowel, both of which could appear similar to [e] but neither of which was actually confused in speech. In the back vowels, the same confusion of *u* and *o* is found as elsewhere; once, *a* appears in the 1sg present ind. in the gloss to the Lindisfarne glosses of the tenth century.

In the grammatical endings, *-e* and *-æ* are confused frequently; probably, the high vowel *-i* is also confused with the former. Though some of the forms in *-i* could represent inherited locative forms, the confusion of the vowel in the final syllable of the 3sg present ind. suggests a phonological explanation is better.

Front and back vowels are never confused in the earliest texts, if the 1sg present ind. in *-e* is considered a grammatical process.

The early loss of final *-e* in northern ME can probably be at least partly attributed to the loss of final *-n* observed as early as the Ruthwell Cross (however, the *-n* later appears more frequently in the st pret pl.: *OEG*, §735f).

### 4.3 Later developments in Northumbrian

Though final unstressed *-e* was lost in all English dialects by the 1500s (see discussion in section 6.1.1), this loss occurred much earlier in the north (Brook, 1963, 64), and was likely accelerated by the eOE loss of final *-n* described by Luick (1940, §654; §715)

Where a consonant was retained, the penultimate vowel *e* became *i*; phonologically, this probably entails a raising of centralish [e] (for which the only OE tangent that comes to mind is the late retention of the 3sg present ind. in *-i-*).

An important text in northern ME is the metrical English psalter, of which a sample is provided by Skeat (1912, 25 f.); later, *Bruce* and the *Cursor Mundi* (extracts are found in Brook (1963), 73-4; *Bruce*: Sisam (1967), 107 ff.) are prominent examples.

The northern dialects of Middle English and of the present day are, of course, most prominent for the heavy Norse influence they retain. And the ON influence is not limited to the vocabulary: Brook (1963, 61 ff.) provides many examples of ON influence on the northern dialects.

But these examples all cover aspects of phonology which are not relevant to the unstressed syllables, partly because they disappeared so early. Townend (2012, 102) suggests that language contact may have contributed to this loss, but see discussion in section 7; the arguments are not convincing.

In the modern dialects of the North, the present participle is often *-ən*, whereas in the rest of the country it is *-in*. The northern forms are probably reflexes of the older participial formation *-ande* rather than southern *-ing*. The *i*-vocalism is, however, common in unstressed prefixes in the north (*be-*, *de-*), where some other dialects have *ə* (Wright, 1905, §227 ff.).

Another northern feature particular to the unstressed vowels is the half-stress that appears more often than in the south (for examples, see Brook (1963, 98)); a result of the half-stress is the non-reduction to [ə].



# Chapter 5

## West Saxon

WS is the dialect most copiously covered in the grammars of OE, and presents us with problems quite different from the northern areas: later texts are in abundance, while earlier texts are few and far between.

### 5.1 The Old West Saxon data

There are few WS texts from before ca. 900. From these, Ch. 3 and Ch. 20, the *Cura Pastoralis*, and selections from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle have been examined.

Later, the Lauderdale MS of the OE Orosius provides a good example of native WS prose, particularly the tale of *Ohthere's voyage*, which is not a translation of a Latin original.

#### 5.1.1 Texts

##### **Charters:**

Ch. 3 is from 778; 20, from 847 (*OET*, 427; 433). The two charters have been selected from the body of available WS charters (Sweet's Ch. 1-3; 20) because they are the only ones extant in contemporary MSS and thus unlikely to be subject to later interference (*OEG*, §16).

##### ***Martyrology* fragment:**

The OE Martyrology is preserved in several MSS of disparate origins. MS Add. 23211 is “evidently of the second half of the 9th century, which is confirmed by the West-Saxon genealogy not coming further down than Alfred. The genealogies being exclusively Saxon seems to point to that dialect, but both texts show several un-Saxon forms . . . alongside of specifically Saxon ones . . . ; perhaps the MS. is a copy of a West-Saxon original by a Kentish scribe” (*OET*, 177); the origin of the Martyrology is probably Mercian (Sisam, 1953).

***Cura Pastoralis:***

MS Cotton Tiberius B XI, as reproduced in Sweet (1871), is thought to be contemporary. It thus stems from the later years of king Alfred’s reign in the late ninth century.

**The Old English *Orosius*:**

Sweet (1883) is a good edition of the text; a later edition with commentary on the different MSS is that of Bately (1980).

The *Voyage of Ohthere* is a tale presented to King Ælfred by a Norseman, and may have carried over peculiarities from ON; nevertheless, it is interesting because it was not translated from Latin.

**The Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle*:**

The Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* is a very important OE text, which is reflected by the many MSS it has been preserved in.

The Parker MS represents the best example of older WS language; it can be dated to ca. 925 (Toon, 1992), and is edited by Earle and Plummer (1965). A linguistic sketch is found in Sprockel (1965, esp. vol. I).



### 5.1.2 Unstressed vowels in frequently found forms

	gV-	bV-	1sg	pret pl	Gen.sg.	Dat.sg.	AD ca.
Charter 3	—	—	—	—	-es	-e	778
Charter 20	—	—	—	—	-es	-e	847
Mart.	ge-	—	-o	-on	-es	-e?	875
Cura P.	ge-	be-	-e (-o)	-on	-es (-as, -æs)	-e (-a)	900
Chronicle	ge-	be-	—	-on (-un)	-es (-æs)	-e (-æ)	925
Orosius	ge-	be-	—	-on	-es	-e	925

### 5.1.3 Discussion of less frequent forms

The less frequent forms found in WS texts include the following:

#### Charters:

Charter 3 is not, in grammatical endings, significantly different from the later WS standard language which would eventually spread to a large part of England by the time of the Norman conquest. In Ch. 20, the situation is the same.

#### *Martyrology* fragment:

1. *wildo* (17): later WS *-u* (cf. Sweet (1970, §29)): perhaps an indication of confusion of [u] and [o] in eWS; interestingly, the st pret pl. *-on* appears quite consistently in WS, whereas the adjective inflection drifts toward *-u*. See also *limo* (18), with the expected acc.pl. ending *-u* (cf. *ricu*); see also Bjorvand and Lindeman (2007, 647).
2. *bidde* (47): because of the somewhat uncertain MS tradition this form may be considered an example of Mercian or Kentish influence (cf. Sisam (1953); *OET*, 177); but given the *-o* form found in the *Cura Pastoralis* — see the following paragraph — it may equally well be another attestation of WS *-o*; see also the Leiden Riddle “found in West Saxon in the Exeter Book” (Sweet, 1984, 183): *hafu* (5), *OET*, 151.

**The *Cura Pastoralis*:**

1. As in Kentish, *[t]he use of io for eo is common in early W.S., and appears but rarely in MSS. of the late W.S. period. Examples offer themselves on every page of the Pastoral.* (Sweet, 1871, xxv); although this may not be directly relevant to the evaluation of the unstressed vowels, it supports a shared origin of WS. and Kentish.
2. The gen.sg. and dat.sg. inflections sporadically appear (in the *a*-stems; the other stem types had generalised *-e-* in WGmc.) with the archaic forms *-as*, *-a*. “The gen. *gæsðæs* (291.9) shows the intermediate stage” (*idem*, xxxvi).
3. The old WGmc. ending *-o* of the 1sg present ind. appears once in the *Cura Pastoralis*. The later date of the WS texts compared with the Kentish may camouflage a common south-eastern trait in the retention of the *-o* until the eight or ninth century, see also the chapter on Mercian (pps. 27 ff.). Otherwise, the language is plain eWS; see, however, Sweet’s (*idem*, xxxvii) note on the inflection of adjectives as a distinctive marker of early as opposed to late WS language.

**The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*:**

1. Sprockel (1965, 78) notes that the svarabhakti vowel in the word *byrig* (dat.sg.) always appears in the simplex (also: *berig*), but *-burg* appears in the compounds.
2. The dat.pl. appears as *-on* twice, cf. *mid horsan* in *Ohthere*. In the ASC, these are both tribal names: *myrceon*, *-seaxon*, cf. the unusual inflections found in place-names, e.g. *merce* in the acc.pl. (discussed on the following page).

**The Old English *Orosius*:**

1. A *u*-stem acc. form in *-o* appears once (Ohthere): *medo*, < WGmc. \**medō*. This form is probably an archaism, see also the possible archaic nominative *u*-stem found on the *Franks Casket* of Northumbria, *flodu*.<sup>22</sup> Possibly, archaic forms were retained in some forms of the *u*-stems because of very frequent words like *sunu* (though our limited early data may reveal only a very small subset of an otherwise thriving paradigm).
2. *mid horsan*: this form appears to be an early levelling of the dat.pl., otherwise in *-um*. Since the form *horsan* appears as a sg. *n*-stem as a proper noun in the *Chronicle* (455: 7 *his broðor Horsan man ofsloh*, Earle and Plummer (1965, 13)), it is tempting to consider whether this is the case here, too (for the sg. need not specify only the numeral sense “one”, but may also signify a concept or manner), but the word does not appear to be an *n*-stem here: *þær beoð þa swiftan hors ungefoge dyre*.

Place-names, as in the other dialects, occasionally appear with the ending *-e* (e.g. *merce*, charter 20), see Sweet (1970, §14) for the acc. plural instead of the expected *-as*; some common nouns have the same tendency. Sweet does not explain the origins of this ending (and neither, to the knowledge of the present writer, has anyone else); it is tempting, considering how these endings tend to appear in place-names, to interpret this as analogy from the strong adjective inflection in plural *-e*.

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<sup>22</sup>Though orthographically the form on the *Franks Casket* is *-u*, it does not necessarily entail [u]; in fact, there are parallel possible reflexes in Anglo-Frisian runic inscriptions of an hypothesised generic back vowel WGmc. \**-ɥ*: *skanomodu* on a solidus, Honorius, fifth (?) century (though Page (1973, 35 f.) places it in the sixth; however, on p. 186, *idem*, the dating is questioned. Page also questions whether it is, in fact, English) Page further (188, *idem*) writes: “the ending has the unstressed vowel *-u* found in other Frisian runic texts”; this refers to, among others, the specimens mentioned by Euler (2013, 43). In comparison with the *Franks Casket* form *flodu*, then, what is interesting to note is that these forms are all *a*-stems (if one ties *-modu* to later OE *mōd* etc., which is reasonable), i.e. the *-u* is not necessarily a retention of an old stem vowel. Interesting on the *skanomodu* inscription is Bammesberger (1990); on the “generic back vowel” and runic Anglo-Frisian unstressed vowels, see also Nielsen (1991b).

## 5.2 Tendencies in Old West Saxon

In comparison with the other OE dialects WS immediately appears quite regular in orthography and accidence. It is notable that syncopation of Gmc. long vowels is unusual in WS and that the *n*-stems have merged to *-an* in the oblique cases. The unique acc. form *medo* in the Orosius is also very interesting, and represents unchanged a WGmc. vowel not commonly found in OE as late as the ninth century.

Sometimes, the high back vowels *o/u* are confused, and, later (e.g. in the Orosius) these are mixed with *a*, too, thus giving the impression of only a single back vowel phoneme, perhaps with allophones (approx.) [a], [u], and [o]. See also Cosijn (1883, 2. Hälfte: 124-5) for the vowel in the st pret pl. ending *-Vn*. As is noted in the discussion on Kentish, this confusion of back phonemes appears to have been common to the southern dialects from the ninth century and on.

The verbal prefixes WGmc. *\*be-*, *\*ge-* appear only as *ge-*, *be-*. The same is true for the nominal prefix *ge-* of the same origin. The first person singular present is *-e*. In *CP*, the form *cweðo* occurs once; in the *Martyrology* fragment in (Sweet, 1885, 177-8), the form *biddo* (from MS. Add. 23211) is found. Sweet (*ibid*) suggests “a copy of a West-Saxon original by a Kentish scribe”; whereas (Sisam, 1953, 216) suggests a “mixture of Anglian and West Saxon forms”. The origin of the *Martyrology* is probably Mercian.

The ending of the 3sg present ind., generally in OE *-eð*, *-iþ* or some variation thereof, is usually syncopated in WS.

The dative and genitive sg. of the abstract nouns in *-ung* is generally *-unga*; in other forms, *-es* and *-e* are found (Cosijn, 1883, 2. Hälfte: 17).

## 5.3 Later developments in West Saxon

Later, the dative plural *-um* appears more frequently as *-on*, *-an*. As the written language of Wessex eventually became a sort of Koine English, it is difficult to establish just what defines it as a particular dialect: many

features from other dialects are found in WS; and other dialects borrow features from WS.

What is apparent, is that the language changes rapidly even from the time of Ælfred to that of Ælfric; later, the text of the *Owl and the Nightingale* may represent the language of Wessex or the south-west Midlands, though localising the dialect is difficult.

After about 1300, the London dialect with its largely Midlands origin becomes the literary standard. Authors like Chaucer have been important in English literature through to the present day, and must have contributed to the prestige of the London dialect, which after the import of Caxton's printing press was allowed to spread. An important source to the south-western ME dialect is John of Trevisa: see Sisam (1967, 145 ff.)

Generally, the unstressed vowels of inflectional endings had all become *e*, implying that regardless of whether they were all phonetically identical, they were no longer phonemically distinct. The weak declension left traces in the plural until the fourteenth century in the south (ModE *children*, *brethren*, and *kine*: see Skeat (1912, 61)). Commonly, the weak adjective declension is retained after demonstratives. The infinitive is generally *-e* in the south, though *-en* occurs sporadically, seemingly for metrical reasons.

The past participle (< OE *-en*) had, like the infinitive (< OE *-an*, become *-e*, with *-en* appearing sporadically; the prefix *ge-* had mostly been reduced to *y-* by the fourteenth century, as in Chaucer's London dialect; Gower rarely uses the prefix (Sisam, 1967, 292) though he was Kentish (Skeat, 1912, 62).

Generally, both of the southern dialects remained conservative into the ME era as far as the unstressed vowels are concerned (Brook, 1963, 71-3). Wright (1905, 266) notes that in ModE, adjectives in *-en* (e.g. "silken") are more widespread in the south-west; some SW dialects retain a prefix *ə-* in the st ppl (*idem*, 297).



# Chapter 6

## The early OE unstressed vowels

This chapter summarises the information provided in the previous chapters on the individual dialects. The development of frequently found grammatical categories is discussed, and explanations are presented for the developments found where the evidence supports an hypothesis.

### 6.1 An Overview

The inflectional syllables the OE dialects are as follows (with comparative data from Rauch (1992), Steller (1928), Holthausen (1921), Streitberg (1974), Braune and Eggers (1987), Euler (2013), Brunner (1956)):

	Kent	Merc.	North.	WS	OF	OS	OHG	WGmc.
gV-	ge-	ge-	gi-	ge-	(g)i-	gi-	gi-	*ga- > *gi-
bV-	be-	bi-	bi-	be-	bi-	bi-	gi-	*bi-
1sg.	-o/u	-o/u	-o	-e	-u/o	-u/o	-u/o	*-ō
st pt pl.	-on	-un/on	-un/on	-on	-un/on	-un/on	-un/on	*-un
dat.sg.	-e	-e	-æ/e	-e	-e/a/i	-e/a	-e/a	*-ē
instr.	—	-a? (VP)	-o?	—	—	-u/o	-u/o	*-u
loc.	—	—	-i?	—	—	—	—	*-ī?
gen.sg	-es	-es	-æs/-es	-es/as	-es/is	-es/as	-es/as	*as
<i>n</i> -st. obl.	-an	-an	-u/o/an	-an	-a	-on/an	-on, -in	*-on, *-in
<i>r</i> -st. n.sg	-ar	-or	-or	-or	-er	-er/ar	-er	*-er

For the instr./loc., no forms are given in the above table unless these are distinct from the dative. In the *n*-stem oblique forms, the OHG and WGmc. forms represent, respectively, the acc. (-*on*) and the gen./dat. forms (-*en/in*). The WS gen.sg. form in -*as* is from the Cura Pastoralis.

The confusion in later texts of *u/o* and *a* probably indicates a gradual approximation of the high and low back vowels into a single back vowel phoneme. This back vowel phoneme is hardly ever confused with a front vowel; the -*as* gen.sg. form in the *CP* may be a result of analogy from the plural, or it may represent the first signs of confusion of these phoneme groups.

In the front vowels, *æ* and *e* appear to be in free variation in Northumbrian grammatical endings, though not in the prefixes. This tendency is also found in the Mercian Ru<sup>1</sup>. Occasionally, there is reason to suspect that *i* and *æ/e* are confused, such as the Épinal instrumental forms in -*i*). Further, the confusion of *i* and *e* in the prefixes in later Northumbrian (whereas earlier, *i* was very consistent) may point towards a merger of the front vowels, too (though perhaps the [i]~[e] high vowel confusion did not include the [æ] sound — however, the two forms of the gen.sg. in the Durham Ritual suggests that the phonetic space of [æ], too, was being encroached on).

The inflectional prefixes and grammatical endings which occur regularly can be summarised thus:

#### **\**ga*-**

The prefix *gV*- appears in OE as either *gi*- or *ge*-. The outcomes in the other WGmc. languages is generally *gi*-, but a form WGmc. \**ga*- must be the origin of e.g. the Pforzen buckle, found as far south as Swabia, with a form *ga*-: Nedoma (2004). This makes the development to *gi*- either a later change within WGmc or a development in the northern WGmc. areas.

The change to *gi*- is probably by analogy from the other common unstressed prefix *bi*- (as a phonological development from \**ga*- to *gi*- seems very unattractive).



Importantly, the OE *gi-* forms are northern: perhaps the form in pre-OE was *\*gi-*; later, a development to *ge-* (i.e. a phonological weakening, cf. the similar development of *\*bi-* in the following section) took place in the south and gradually spread to the north (later texts such as Ru<sup>2</sup>, Lindisfarne and the Durham ritual show *ge-* forms).

### ***\*bi-***

Similarly for the unstressed prefix *bV-*: the PGmc. form appears to have been retained in WGmc., but a form *be-* is found in southern England. Where it differs from *gV-* is the geographical spread of the *-e-* forms: both Mercian and Northumbrian retain *bi-* forms.

A similar development is possible here: a weakened form in *be-* appears in the south, and spreads gradually to the northern dialects. The reason why the *ge-* form was allowed to spread further and faster is that it was not synchronically transparent, whereas *bi* appears also as an independent word in OE, i.e. the association between the prefix *bV-* and the adposition *bi* made it more resistant to vowel reduction than *gV-*.

### **1sg present ind.**

The 1sg present ind. in *-e*, which appears to have spread from the south (whether Kentish underwent the same process as WS or if the trend was a sign of south-western influence, cannot be decided from the data found here), is hardly a phonological process for the reasons stated above, i.e. that the vowels *-u/o* and *-e* do not appear to be confused anywhere else than in this grammatical ending.

The forms in *-o/-u* found in eWS and eKentish may represent lexical patterning or a habitual rendering of set expressions rather than a productive ending.

### **st pret pl.**

As in the non-*e* forms of the 1sg present ind., the endings of the st pret pl. varies between *-on* and *-un* even in very early text, and is as clear

a sign of phonological change as one could hope for. No grammatical inflections retain a clear distinction between the two.

### **Dat.sg. and minor cases**

The *a*-stem (i.e. PIE \**ō*-stem) dat.sg. ending is generally *-e*, though *-æ* is found in the North. The possible retention of distinct instrumental or locative endings remains a complex discussion, see therefore the relevant sections (3; 3.1.3).

### **Gen.sg**

As with the dative forms, the gen.sg. of the *a*-stems is generally *-es*, with *-æs* appearing primarily in the North. Extraordinarily, forms in *-as* are found in the *CP* (WS).

### **The *n*-stems**

Here, the anomalous dialect is once again Northumbrian, where the final *-n* is often lost (Luick, 1940, §654). As a result, seemingly, the vowel is more open to variation (i.e. confusion); the *n*-declension was destined to spread in the south (Morris, 1866, xi ff.).

### **The *r*-stems**

In the nom.sg. of the *r*-stems (where WS *fæder* and its variants is not taken into consideration), the Kentish forms in *-ar* is the most unusual form.; otherwise, “[n]ormal variation between *-er*, *-or*, *-ur* is found in final syllables” (*OEG*, §629). In the gen.sg. the forms *feadur*, *fadur*, *fador* etc. have been the topic of much discussion, and the parallel to Vedic *pítúr* is often made: see Lane (1951) for examples as well as a discussion on the issue, cf. also the more recent summary in Hogg and Fulk (2011, vol. II: 55). It may be noted that the Anglian forms match ON *fǫður*, while the southern forms are akin to OF *feder*.

The form *gibroþær* (Franks Casket) “appears to represent an earlier form of the ablaut vowel” (*idem*, 57); this hardly explains anything, but other explanations cause problems, too: though a dual form is an appealing prospect, it would be a unique occurrence in the Gmc.

noun system; further, the parallel to e.g. Gk. *phrátere* (dual) is not perfect.

Many of the parallels between the different OE dialects and their continental siblings are commented on by Nielsen (1981, particularly Ch. ix).

### 6.1.1 Unstressed vowels and the transition to Middle English

The *communis opinio* has long been that the unstressed vowels gradually merged to ə during the transition from Old to Middle English (Wright (1925, §134), Wright (1928), Sisam (1967, 283 ff.), Jordan (1968, §133 ff.), Barber (1993, 157 ff.), Fortson (2010, §15.65), etc.); Brunner (1953, §24 ff.) writes:

ae. *a, o, u* im Auslaut und in Flexionsendungen sind im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert zu einem zuerst unregelmäßig, dann mit *e* bezeichneten Laut geworden. *æ* und *i* waren in diesen Stellungen schon früh-ae. zu *e* geworden. Es gab daher me. in Endungssilben außer *e* nur noch: *i* in den Nachtonsilben *-isch* und *-ing, -inde, -liche* und *-y* ...

Importantly, this account highlights the non-weakening of the derivational suffixes and diminutives. This is probably a result of half-stress, and is mirrored by the development in MHG (Wright (1968, §6 ff.); Fortson (2010, §15.77); Paul (1884, §58), etc.). As far as the inflectional endings not in half-stressed position are concerned, the merger to ə appears to have been the most commonly found outcome, though some much later MSS from the central Midlands area (such as the Ashburnham XXVII MS, see Sisam (1967, 117 ff.) for an extract) retain the contrast in e.g. the st. ppl. in *-en* and the st pret pl. *-un*, thereby showing that the above is a simplification. We have seen that the loss of vowel contrast, or of the final vowel as a whole, was most progressive in the North. This makes language contact an appealing mode of explanation (the area under Norse control is shown on the map in section 1.1.2):

In a situation in which speakers of two languages were repeatedly in contact with one another, it is quite possible that these inflexional differences became eroded or ignored, as they played no role (or were even a hinderance) in effective communication between speakers of two languages (Townend, 2012, 102).

While it certainly seems natural that superfluous inflections are dropped, it is a leap to assume that this would only be the case in a contact situation; indeed, Benskin (2001) has shown just how little the inflections contributed to the meaning of monolingual early West Saxon. Thus it seems unnecessary to attribute this shift to extralinguistic factors. Contact may have accelerated this process, but not effected it.

Importantly, the gradation of unstressed vowels was not a change through which all vowels collapsed to *ə* at the same time; the process was sequential: the high back vowels *u* and *o* are used interchangeably from the very beginning of OE (attested) literacy, whereas the back and front vowels remain separate even in the fourteenth century. The back vowels *u* and *o* were also confused with *a* in the Anglian dialects in the tenth century, in the Ru<sup>1</sup> and the glosses to the Lindisfarne gospels. In the Cura Pastoralis (WS), *a* is confused with *e* in the gen. and dat. sg. forms; similarly, gerundive forms in *-onne* (OEG, 375) suggest that at least in WS, *a* was becoming indistinguishable from *o*. See further OEG, §377: OE had virtually two unaccented back vowels, *o/u* and *a*. The distinction of these is clearly seen to be weakening in Kt. charters of the ninth century, *-a* sometimes appearing for *-o/-u*. So, too, in the Kentish glosses, where the vowels are “freely interchangeable” (OEG, §377).

At or around the same time, the front vowels *i* and *e* were confused, too. In Northumbrian, the unstressed prefixes *ge-/gi-* are confused particularly in the Durham Ritual (as is the dat.sg.); some confusion is also found in the Ru<sup>2</sup>. Similarly in Northumbrian, the 3sg present ind. is *-iþ* early (e.g. on the Franks Casket); later, forms in *-e-* replace them. In the south, the 3sg present ind. is often syncopated.

### 6.1.2 Inherited root nouns in the OE dialects

The unstressed vowels occurring in the OE root nouns inherited from PIE make up a slightly different category from that of the vowels of grammatical pre- and suffixes. Often, these have no etymological reason to have vowels before the final consonants in the nom. and acc., whereas the dat. often terminates in -CiC (with corresponding Umlaut of the root vowel, e.g. *byrig*, *sylh*. Examples include *burug* (*OEG*, §366) (commonly *burg*, *burh*; but see also OHG *buruc* and ModE *borough*) and *suluh* (*sulh*; derived: *sulung*).

Not all root nouns which occur in OE have consonants between which vowels were inserted: *āc*, *bōk*, *brōc* (for vowels are never inserted in stressed syllables), *duru* (though it has been made into a *u*-stem), *fōt*, *gāt*, *cū*, *lūs*, *mūs*; so, too, with *gōs*, where the Gmc. *\*-an-* > OE *-ō-* (OHG *gans*). Some that do, are not attested with extra vowels: *spyrd*, *turf*, *pruh*, *wloh*.<sup>23</sup> The same is true for *ealh* (< *\*alχ-*, but OS, OHG *alah*).

Others do occur with inserted vowels in OE: in addition to the above mentioned *burug*, *suluh*, we find *furuh*. *Meoloc* appears to be etymologically disyllabic (Griepentrog, 1995, 287-304), at least in Gmc. Next to *burg*, we find *berg*: this ablaut variation of the same root noun<sup>24</sup> occurs with an inserted vowel, too: e.g. *-berig* on the Franks Casket. The Franks Casket form is a dative, where normally *byrig* is found, particularly in the simplex; often as a second constituent in a compound word (such as a personal name), the dative is *-burge* (Sprockel, 1965, 78).

The development of svarabhakti vowels in OE (Wright, 1925, §220) continued in ME (Wright, 1928, §135): this appears to have been a process found in all OE dialects as well as in OS and OHG, though syllabic *r* ap-

<sup>23</sup>For all of these, variant forms are also attested; for a more complete list of attested forms, see Healey et al. (1980).

<sup>24</sup>ModG. *Berg/Burg* and their cognates seem to be variants of the same root, with *-ur-* from the zero-grade and *-er-* from the *e*-grade. Bjorvand and Lindeman (2007, 85-6) provide an IE etymology for Norwegian *berg*, but suggest that *borg* may have a *Wanderwort* etymology. Certainly it is difficult to explain particularly non-IE forms (such as Arabic *burj*) otherwise; the Greek *púrgos* also fails to match the Germanic forms. Grimm and Grimm (1860, vol. II, 534) supplies an alternate form *phúrkos*, which also fails to match. See also Pokorny (1959, 140). However, regardless of any unetymological siblings within IE, the reflexes within Gmc. may be regular variants of the same root.

pears in the oldest glosses; syllabic *l* is less common but occasionally found (Bülbring, 1902, §443-4).

Due to the very limited data available from the early OE period, it is difficult to claim whether any one dialect developed svarabhakti vowels earlier or at a higher rate than elsewhere — but in the modern dialects, the phenomenon is much more common in the north (Wright, 1905, §234): the tendency in Old Northumbrian to accentuate the svarabhakti vowel (Bülbring, 1902, §448) is one likely cause of this.

The quality of the inserted vowel is dependant on surrounding sounds: Brunner (1956, §156-6)

## 6.2 Dialectal continuity as evidenced by unstressed vowels

In the two southern dialects, though the unstressed vowels were already merged by the time of John of Trevisa or Dan Michel, the retentions of OE inflectional categories remain conservative when compared with the northern dialects.

The inflections with final *-n* spread to other categories; in the north, the final *-n* was already gone in several eight-century texts (Luick, 1940, §715; §654).

That unstressed vowels are retained more faithfully where there is a final consonant to protect it is commonplace in linguistic evolution (see section 7.1).

The development of svarabhakti vowels in OE discussed in the previous section is difficult to assign to any dialect in particular. Possibly, the Northumbrian accentuation of these vowels lead to the higher rate of svarabhakti vowels in ModE.

# Chapter 7

## Causes for phonological change

Whether the causes for phonological change in the OE unstressed vowels is intralinguistic or extralinguistic is not a question which may with ease be answered decisively. In this chapter, two possible intralinguistic causes for the changes observed in the previous chapter will be discussed, as well as possible language contact features in the English phonology.

Though the chapter finds no significant reason to attribute directly the reduction in the variety of unstressed vowels to language contact, other contact features in the English language may have contributed to the changes described here: for example, the unpalatalised consonants found in the northern dialects are the result of Old Norse influence (Luick, 1940, §701 ff.) and could have indirectly affected the vowel changes in northern OE.

It is also important to consider the reduction of variation within English not as a process which began in OE and turned the language into ME, but rather as a gradual reduction of the complexity of inflectional morphology from (pre-) PIE through Common Germanic and up to the present day. This drift can be observed everywhere in Indo-European languages: from Sanskrit to Hindi, from Latin to French, from Old Norse to Norwegian, and from Old Church Slavonic to Bulgarian.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Some IE languages have added new grammatical categories: the Tocharian case system has added new categories; Latin, Indo-Iranian, and Greek have innovative future tense systems, and so on — but the overall direction of change is undeniable.

## 7.1 Loss or change of final consonants

The northern dialects lost the variation in unstressed syllables earlier than the southern (sections 4.1.2; 4.3, cf. 5.3, 2.3). This correlates with an early loss of a final consonant *-n* in the North, whereas the southern dialects retained final *-n* and spread it by analogy to other inflectional classes.

In one instance in particular, a southern dialect is more innovative than the Anglian dialects: the dat.pl. in *-um* shows little variation in the North, but in eWS the *-m* begins to appear as *-n*; in lWS, *-on* and *-un* appear side by side (Cosijn, 1883, 2. Hälfte: 17). And whereas there is variation in e.g. the st pret pl. (*-un*, *-on*) is found in all dialects, a dat. pl. in *\*\*-om* is never found in the texts examined; probably, the development was *-um* > *-un* > *-on* (*OEG*, §572). The implication is that *-m* more effectively retained the original vowel quality in this ending.

This is comparable to the earlier shifts in English (Bülbring (1902, §357), Wright (1925, §211), Brunner (1956, §143), *OEG*, §331, 347), and suggests a sequential weakening process repeating itself.

## 7.2 Speech tempo as a catalyst for change

Roach (1998) found no significant difference in the speech tempo of different languages, but called for more research on the subject. In 2011, Pellegrino et al. published a highly influential paper which concludes with the following two hypotheses:

Two hypotheses motivate the approach taken in this article. The first one states that, for functional reasons, the rate of linguistic information transmitted during speech communication is, to some extent, similar across languages. The second hypothesis is that this regulation results in a density/rate trade-off between the average information density carried by speech chunks and the number of chunks transmitted per second. . . . These results support the idea that, despite the large variation observed in



phonological complexity among languages, a trend toward regulation of the information rate is at work, as illustrated here ... The existence of this density/rate trade-off may thus illustrate a twofold least-effort equilibrium in terms of ease of information encoding and decoding on the one hand, vs. efficiency of information transfer through the speech channel on the other.

In other words, languages which convey more information per syllable are spoken at a reduced syllable rate and vice versa. In terms of English historical phonology, this allows us to hypothesise on a purely speculative level that the speech tempo of OE was similar to that of ModG (which has a similar rate of inflectional complexity), and it would follow that the speech tempo, i.e. syllables per second, of English increased significantly throughout the middle ages.

The relevance of such an hypothesis lies in the articulation of short syllables: if the language carries less information per syllable, this correlates with a narrower interval between stressed syllables, which means less time for the intermediate unstressed syllables (unless they are dropped, as for example the final *-e* in late Middle English: this complicates matters, and a more thorough study on syllable counts is required). Less time per syllable would imply reduced time for the articulatory organs to move into the “correct” position, and Fry (1955) finds that unstressed vowels are shorter than stressed vowels. Lindblom (1963) illustrates the reduction in these syllables (though his examples are from Swedish); these results are interesting when compared with the OE phonological processes of merger, particularly in the back vowels — though a separate study would have to be carried out in order to establish a credible connection between the processes.

## 7.3 Linguistic Neighbours

Any historical discussion on the English language is incomplete without some mention of language contact, and it “is a factor that is to some extent present in all changes” (Samuels, 1972, 178).

This cannot explain all of the linguistic changes in the history of English: certainly, one may well argue that certain aspects of English linguistic history stem from ON (and rightly so), but where an intralinguistic cause can be identified with reasonable certainty, it must always be the preferred mode of explanation. Where there are no credible intralinguistic explanations, looking to language contact becomes more attractive. Note that though dialect contact also constitutes language contact, it is not taken into consideration in this chapter: the difficulties of the subject are outlined by Samuels (1972, 97 ff.)

But in any language shift where the population is not displaced, a period of bilingualism, though it may only be 1-2 generations, is necessary. In earlier literature (cited in Laker (2008)), a displacement of the pre-invasion English population (regardless of whether they spoke a Celtic language, Latin, or something else entirely) was assumed; more recently, genetic evidence has confirmed that the indigenous population was not displaced (Oppenheimer, 2006); hence, bilingualism must at some point have been a factor across England.

Contact with Celtic and Latin are the most important to a study of the early OE language; accordingly, these receive the more complete treatment, whereas ON will be considered only summarily. Norman French, though it influences the ME data compared to the OE data here, will not be taken into consideration.

Samuels (1972, 93 ff.) distinguishes between two main categories of language contact, into which each specimen is grouped according to “whether the contact takes place via competent bilinguals or not.” The main problem with this distinction lies in the word “competent”, which is obviously not a binary value (“[m]utual understanding is a relative concept”, Weinreich (1953, Preface, viii)); nonetheless, if one were to categorise according to the types of contact features which are transferred, certainly patterns would emerge where certain types of transfer would correlate with either Samuels’ type *A* (“competent bilinguals”) or type *B* (shortage of competent bilinguals).

The reason for supposing that a substrate language like Celtic would

influence English phonology and other aspects of the language lies in precedence: Samuels (1972, 95 f.) writes that

grammatical, phonological and phonetic features may also cross language boundaries, as is shown by the spread of uvular [R] to replace the original [r] in much of western Europe, or by the spread of retroflex consonants from Dravidian to the Indo-European languages of India. ...English, because of its geographical separation from the Continent, provides fewer and less obvious examples.

Synchronically, the implications are the same:

[I]f present trends are not reversed, it is possible to envisage a situation where the English dialects of Wales and north-west Scotland will have outlived Welsh and Gaelic, yet will still retain special phonetic features derived from the period of bilingualism ... the intonation- and stress-patterns surviving from Welsh or Gaelic 'substrata' might well have led to further phonetic changes in the English of those areas.

The idea of phonetic transfer during a period of bilingualism is generally accepted; in the following sections, some of these topics will be addressed.

### 7.3.1 Celtic

The first Indo-European language to settle on the British Isles was Celtic, displacing whatever ancestral language(s) that may have been present on the island.

Received knowledge is that Celtic has had little influence on English: the yardstick has been the (diminutive) number of Celtic loan-words in English; however, as we shall see, the domain of syntax suggests that that influence was significant. The influence of Celtic upon English in pre-literate times can be divided into two subcategories, which may only with some difficulty be cleanly separated: (1) direct Celtic influence, and (2) influence through

British Latin, which may have had a significant Celtic element (Schrijver, 2002). The latter will see more discussion in the following section.

As to the former, namely direct influence from Celtic, the practical absence of loan-words as well as the historical context imply that Celtic was the low-status language of the two. Where we must look for evidence of such influence is rather in the phonology and syntax. Jespersen (1905, 39) writes:

There was nothing to induce the ruling classes to learn the language of the inferior natives; it could never be fashionable for them to show an acquaintance with that despised tongue by using now and then a Celtic word. On the other hand the Celt would have to learn the language of his masters, and learn it well ... the influence they themselves exercised on English would be infinitesimal.

Later, Jespersen writes: “If Keltic ever had ‘a finger in the pie,’ it must have been immediately on the taking over of the new language” (Jespersen, 1922).

Several syntactic features of English have been tied to Celtic influence; the value of these transfers from Celtic lies in the implications this would have for the nature of the contact between the two languages.

The fact that such cases of syntactical interference only became apparent in the ME period is commonly mentioned as a caveat to their Celtic origins. But there is good reason to believe that our extant OE texts are derived from a narrow social strata, which was unlikely to have been influenced by Celtic language practice. Many syntactic features of English are, from a Gmc. point of view, pure innovations, and their presence neighbouring languages seems too much of a coincidence to ignore. Rather, these constructions would have gradually made their way into the English language: first into the language of L2 speakers of English, and after the Norman invasion, which made the Celtic and the English both into conquered languages, it spread into a larger segment of the English-speaking population.

However, the presence of Celtic syntactic features in English does not automatically entail that (1) these do, in fact, stem from Celtic, and (2) even if they stem from Celtic, that any phonetic features were necessarily transferred with them. Shared innovation between neighbouring languages irrespective of language contact is no logical impossibility; and secondly, English L1 speakers may very well have imitated Celtic constructions, thereby excluding phonetic transfer from the equation.

And though some features may be the result of Celtic influence (for one possible example, see Benskin (2011)), other claims can hardly be called anything else than presumption. In terms of phonology, the proof is too diffuse: where the English innovations are concerned, these can be explained intralinguistically; and where English retentions unique amongst the Gmc. languages are concerned, these constitute no more than negative proof, i.e. they prove that — as an example — the retention of /θ/ and /ð/ in English as opposed to their loss elsewhere in Gmc. *may* have been influenced by Celtic, since Brittonic, too, has both phonemes (see also Tolkien (1983)).

Similarly with the loss of final syllables: though Brittonic did indeed undergo the same process as did OE, it was probably completed by the time of the battle of Deorham (Sims-Williams (1990); Evans (1990); Jackson (1953), particularly 694 ff.) and thus too early to be considered a parallel change to that of English.

### 7.3.2 British Latin

It has been a matter of some dispute to what extent Latin was, in fact, a prominent spoken language in England at the time of the Germanic invasions following 499. Irvine (2012, 41) goes so far as to say that only runes had been available for writing English before the Christening of 597 AD, but the Celtic population would have to be at least partly literate before the Germanic tribes arrived, and they certainly did not write in runes.

Schrijver (2009), on the other hand, holds the view is that the Celtic population of England shifted gradually to Latin, and thus carried on a

Celtic substratum through their Latin phonology.<sup>26</sup> Stotz (1996-2004, vol. I, §36 ff.), however, does not believe that the Celts spoke Latin:

England ist die einzige Region Europas, in welcher die lat. Sprache nacheinander in zwei voneinander völlig getrennten Vorgängen eingeführt wurde. Damit, daß dies möglich war, ist bereits gesagt, daß der erste von ihnen keine dauerhaften Ergebnisse gezeitigt hatte. ...Seit dem Anfang des 5. Jh's war die Insel sich selber überlassen.

Though it is clear that Latin loan-words remained, the question of whether the language was spoken as a first language remains unclear. The Latin spoken in Britain would initially be undistinguishable from Latin anywhere else in the Roman world where soldiers from different parts of the empire met and colonised. But there are signs of “a Romanised Celtic population which had not received any sort of literary education” (Adams, 2007, 579): the ‘curse tablets’ of southern Britain betray non-standard Latin; several of the linguistic peculiarities of these (such as a merger of /e/ and /i/) are mirrored by Latin inscriptions found in Gaul (*idem*, 596 ff.; 640 ff.; 652 ff.); [t]here is reason to think that [the curse tablets] spring from a Celtic population which had taken up Latin (*idem*, 634; 583 ff.).

The curse tablets are dated to “roughly the second to fourth centuries AD” (Adams, 1992, 1); they share features not only with some Latin inscriptions of Gaul, but with Welsh, particularly the shift *-er-* to *-ar-*. However, the opening of *e* to *a* before *r* occurred in Vulgar Latin in other areas of the empire, too — and whether there was a significant share of bilinguals, or whether the Latin had fallen into disuse when the Germanic tribes arrived, remains difficult to establish. Independent innovation remains a possibility.

Spoken Latin may have absorbed phonological features from Celtic L2 speakers of Latin. This, however, does not imply that Celtic was displaced,

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<sup>26</sup>A very similar idea was raised by Jespersen (1960, 679): “This question is largely mixed up with another question which has been much discussed of late years, namely, what language did the Angles and Saxons find generally spoken on their arrival in England? Had Latin supplanted Celtic, totally or partially? This, however, need not occupy us long here, as it really falls outside of the history of English proper.”

even in the areas which are not now Celtic-speaking.

What seems more probable is that a Celtic population, with some share of Latin-speaking bilinguals, was absorbed into the Germanic-speaking society that expanded around them or migrated west. Those who remained switched directly from their language to Old English; those who migrated westwards were absorbed into the Welsh population, where non-lexical Latin influence disappeared within one generation of L1 learners. If, however, they had spoken Latin (i.e. a language switch scenario), there would likely be more signs of this in Welsh.

### 7.3.3 Old Norse

The traditional yardstick for linguistic influence — loan-words — certainly gives more credit to ON than to Celtic, but how significant was ON influence on OE phonology? When *þa ærestan scipu deniscra manna* arrived sometime during the reign of Beorhtric in the late Eighth century,<sup>27</sup> most of the sources used to examine northern OE phonology had already been written; yet linguistic contact from ca. AD 800 cannot be entirely ignored.

The nature of the loan-vocabulary left in ModE suggests every-day interaction: food, tradable commodities, and even personal pronouns. Additionally, many farms located on low-quality land carry Norse names.<sup>28</sup>

But the implications for phonological influence on English remain vague. It is clear that the language contact is of Samuels' type A, and that as a result some features were transferred. Examples include the frequent non-palatalised and non-assibilated forms of certain consonants found in the areas formerly under Norse control (Luick, 1940, §701).

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<sup>27</sup>Often, the year 787 is provided for the arrival of the Norsemen. However, this is the year of Beorhtric's ascension to the throne, and it is during his reign that the Norsemen arrive; the year, then, could be off by as much as 15 years.

<sup>28</sup>Another implication one could read from the naming of farms, of course, is that the local Norse chiefs gave the farms ON names regardless of who actually occupied them at the time; while this would make a lot of sense synchronically, it appears unlikely that ON names would remain in use long after the conquest if they were only upheld by a centralised administrative institution that died with the Danelaw (see map in section 1.1.2) in AD 1066.

However, the loss of phonemic contrast in the unstressed vowels had begun before the English Viking age. Language contact did not cause this loss, but may have accelerated it (Townend (2012, 102), Lutz (2010), Lutz (2013)). And though ON had not levelled the unstressed vowels (Heusler (1960), Heusler (1967)), the difficulty in assigning the native phonology to the corresponding OE sounds would typically problems (Weinreich (1953, 14-28), Haugen (1954, 382)).



# Chapter 8

## Conclusion

### 8.1 Foreign influence on early English phonology, regional variation

The phonological peculiarities of English, as with all other languages, may be divided into two groups: innovations where closely related languages generally remain conservative, and retentions of features which the related languages have lost.

One example of the former is the many changes which affected stressed vowels in English, such as the Great Vowel Shift unparalleled in other Germanic languages; an example of the latter is the retention of two distinct phonemes /θ/ and /ð/.

The reduction of unstressed syllables can be considered neither: cognate languages have undergone similar processes, whether through loss of unstressed prefixes entirely (as in North Germanic), a centering of inflectional vowels (as in Middle High German), or a loss of final syllables (Common Germanic).

Because of this, there is little reason to attribute the vowel gradation in unstressed syllables to language contact: processes of reduction had been active since before English was separated from its neighbouring languages, and it would be unusual indeed had they not undergone reduction.

## 8.2 The Old English unstressed vowel processes

Changes to the vowel system of unaccented syllables may be explained through the following processes: (1) analogy, by which, for example, the instrumental form of the noun was replaced by that of the dative; (2) substitution, by which the ending of the first-person singular verbal ending WGmc.  $*\bar{o}$  was gradually replaced by  $-e$ , and (3) phonological developments.

To be regarded as the results of phonological developments are the following changes:

**The weakening of unstressed prefixes** to  $-e-$ : this process began in the southern dialects (pp. 18, 52) and spread to the northern dialects. The prefix (southern)  $ge-$  was not synchronically transparent, and was allowed to spread to Northumbrian in the second half of the tenth century.

The prefix (again, southern)  $be-$  was still associated with the adposition  $bi$ ; it did not spread beyond Mercia, where it appears only in the late tenth-century text Ru<sup>1</sup>.

**Confusion of  $o$  and  $u$**  : an active process in all dialects in the earliest texts, though partially conditioned: *OEG*, 373.

**Confusion of  $u/o$  and  $a$**  : in the ninth century, confusion of all three OE unaccented back vowels began in Kentish (frequently in the strong pret. pl. forms  $-an$ , but see also Ch. 37, 45, etc.); later (becoming commonplace in the tenth century), this happens in all dialects (Ru<sup>1</sup>, Lindisfarne; IWS: *OEG*, §49).

**Confusion of  $\text{æ}/e$  and of  $e/i$**  : in the south-east, these are stable: see the endings the gen.sg. and the dat.sg. of the  $a$ -stems in Kentish p. 18; cf. WS on p. 52, where forms in  $-\text{æ}$  begin to appear in the

Chronicle. In the North, spellings in *-æ* are more common, whereas in the Midlands they are rare. *e* is also sometimes confused with *i*, usually by *e* being substituted for forms in historically *i*: *OEG*, §369. This may have been a contributing factor to the changes described in the unstressed prefixes *ge-*, *be-*, but their remaining distinct in Mercian suggests that the vowels of the prefixes behaved differently from those of the grammatical endings (cf. the *-i* endings of the Épinal and Corpus glossaries, also Mercian). *i* and *æ* were not confused in early texts (cf. the vowel reduction chart on p. 11); later, *-e-* was used for all unstressed front vowels (in the Durham ritual, all three are confused). The alleged instrumental forms in the *VP* (Zeuner, 1881, 120) may also indicate early confusion with the front vowels.

**The back vowels** were thus to be considered as interchangeable by the eleventh century in all dialects. They remained in opposition to the front vowels; but since *ə* is generally written <*e*> in Middle and Modern English, it is difficult to establish when *e* is no longer to be understood as specifically a front vowel. The most reliable measure is opposition to the back vowels: in the twelfth-century *Orrmulum*, no opposition can be found in the grammatical endings (but the unstressed prefix is *bi-*); this situation is reflected by the spelling systems of Middle Kentish (i.e. the *Ayenbite of Inwyrt*) and in the north (where the vowels are often lost); if a front/back vowel opposition persisted into the fourteenth century (cf. p. 63), its geographical distribution must have been part of the central Midlands area.

The changes in the back vowels begin with a confusion of the two high vowels (*u* and *o*) both in the north and the south, later spreading to the low back vowel (*a*) in southern texts.

In the front vowels, the confusion of the low vowels (*æ* and *e*) is can only with difficulty be considered apart from the changes in the stressed syllables (such as the Kentish fronting of *æ* > *e*, or the second fronting seen in the *VP* and other West Mercian texts). In WS, however, the *-æ* or even *-a* spellings for expected *-e* appear in the *CP* and the Chronicle in the early

tenth century; in Northumbrian, the dat.sg. in particular shows variation both in the early and the late texts.

Older *i* is replaced by *e* early (Épinal, Corpus, Franks Casket and Ruthwell still have them: whether this is indicative of a later retention in the north or a very early sign of confusion of the front vowels cannot be decisively concluded. Whether one understands the Old Northumbrian nominal endings in *-i* as an old locative or not also has implications for the understanding of the phonology: here, it is argued that these forms are signs of confusion of the front vowels, though it is also possible to argue that they retain an archaic case form.

In conclusion, and considering the prefixes apart (see the discussion on page 60), the front vowels were confused earlier in the north (Épinal, Corpus, Franks Casket), whereas in the south, all three back vowels were confused by 900. In the North, the early confusion of the back vowels only affected the high back vowels *u/o*.

The later retention in the south of the prefix *ge-* as *ə-* and of the weak adjective inflection, as well as other forms in unstressed final *-e*, suggests that language contact with Old Norse did not affect the process of vowel gradation, but may have caused the eventual complete loss of these vowels.

There is one central caveat to the findings reported here, namely that of frequency. In the tables presented in chapters two through five, a singular occurrence of a form is represented as equally important as a plethora of occurrences in longer texts.

This is a problem with the data, and would only have been possible to avoid by considering all texts within one dialect area as representatives of the same language. Had this course been taken, however, it would have been difficult to consider the development within the individual dialects; and while ideally both ought to have been done within the same study, the choices made leave much work to be done in future examinations.

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